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By Karen Wilber at 6:09 pm, Dec 06, 2022

TOWN OF NORTHBOROUGH

Master Plan Implementation Committee
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Master Plan Implementation Committee Meeting

October 20, 2022

Zoom Meeting Minutes

Approved November 17, 2022

7:00pm—Chairman's Introduction to Remote Meeting

Mr. Leif, Chairman, opened the remote meeting. Mr. Leif stated that this Open Meeting of the Master Plan Implementation Committee was being conducted remotely consistent with Governor Baker's Executive Order of July 16, 2022, an Act Relative to Extending Certain COVID-19 Measures Adopted During the State of Emergency and that all members of the Master Plan Implementation Committee are allowed and encouraged to participate remotely. Mr. Leif noted that the Order allows the MPIC to meet entirely remotely so long as reasonable public access is afforded so that the public can follow along with the deliberations of the meeting. He added that ensuring public access does not ensure public participation unless such participation is required by law. Mr. Leif noted that this meeting will not allow for Public Comment. He indicated that the public may view the meeting via the link as listed on the posted agenda.

Members Present, remotely: Rick Leif, Chair; Ashley Davies, Vice-Chair; Julianne Hirsch, Amy Poretsky, Millie Milton, Tracey Cammarano, Fran Bakstran, Gene Kennedy, Jeanne Cahill, John Campbell, Dario DiMare.

Others Present, remotely: Laurie Connors, Planning Director; Mike Easler, Johnathan Law, Cheri Ruane, Ashley Sweet; Weston and Sampson.

The meeting opened at 7:00pm.

Discussion with Consultant Regarding Downtown Revitalization Strategy & Design Report, Timeframe

Johnathan Law, Project Manager from Weston and Sampson, provided a team introduction and a project report. He anticipated the project would have a duration of about eight months, ending around April 2023, with a considerable number of meetings planned with this committee as well as local business owners and residents, resulting in a final report with a concept design for the Downtown. Interviews with businesses and stakeholders, to be facilitated by RKG with involvement from Weston and Sampson, should be beginning in the next few weeks.

Mr. Leif clarified that subsequent MPIC meetings will start with an update from Weston & Sampson while other analysis and design work occurs simultaneously. Meetings between Weston and Sampson, Ms. Connors, Mr. Leif and Ms. Davies will be held prior to MPIC meetings for the purposes of finalizing agenda topics. There may be other times that they need to meet between MPIC meetings if there are interim decisions to be made or questions to be answered.

Mr. DiMare asked if all members were invited or if it was limited to this group.

Ms. Connors felt it was redundant since the purpose of the discussion would be to finalize agenda topics for the MPIC meeting scheduled to take place later in the week. Additionally, those will not be posted meetings and cannot have a quorum.

Ms. Bakstran noted that it could be problematic not knowing if more than one or two members could join in advance, as that could constitute a violation of Open Meeting Law; it's best to leave it as it is and rely on the smaller group to report back on their posted meetings. Mr. Leif agreed.

Ms. Hirsh wished to continue this discussion after the presentation.

Mr. Law continued to update the MPIC. Work completed to date included community engagement at Applefest; implementation of the online survey; completion of the site walk; coordination with staff on information gathering; discussions with MassDOT.

Mr. Leif felt Weston and Sampson was off to a strong start.

Mr. Campbell asked what came out of the site walk, as he wasn't able to attend.

Ms. Ruane thought the walk was very productive. The group walked down both sides of Main Street and some side streets (South Street, Gale Street, Monroe Street, Church Street, Blake Street, Pierce Street and Hudson Street. She asked Ms. Sweet to share her idea of a proposed business workshop.

Ms. Sweet described an exercise she'd employed in the past which she said helped get buy-in from business owners and allowed for more collaboration. This was one of the tools used in working on the Route One Corridor in Westerly, Rhode Island.

Mr. Leif said he'd learned from Mr. Law that if MassDOT is able to review recent traffic counts for the center, they may be more amenable to options for improvement if the traffic counts justify it. Mr. Law said that MassDOT follows Complete Streets guidelines and if this group adheres to those guidelines, they may be more amenable to accepting changes along this corridor than years ago.

Mr. Kennedy said he hoped the outreach will focus on properties that are either vacant or have empty buildings. Ms. Connors said her goal for that workshop will be to invite all of the property owners and business owners in the downtown. Ms. Milton asked if that included Town-owned properties. Ms. Connors asked if she meant including the Town Administrator and Board of Selectmen; Ms. Milton said yes. Ms. Connors thought there would be some benefit to that.

Mr. Kennedy asked how members can access the information that is being compiled and if it will be shared on the Town's website. Ms. Connors said that information will be shared on a Downtown Revitalization webpage which will be linked from the Planning Department's page.

Members expressed their support. Mr. Leif thanked the consultants for their time.

Update on Status of Complete Streets Prioritization Plan and Public Input

Ms. Connors updated the committee on the outcome of the public input session held at the Board of Selectmen's most recent meeting. The presentation was a joint effort between herself, Scott Charpentier and consultants from Woodard and Curran, and similar to what had been presented to this Committee at the previous month's meeting. Mr. Charpentier went through the twenty-five proposed projects, including the project suggested by Committee members at the last meeting, the Hudson Street project, where there is no sidewalk between the Housing Authority

property and the Church. Another request has been received for the addition of a sidewalk on Brigham Street. The most popular projects appeared to be the Downtown sidewalk projects; the Aqueduct Multi-Purpose Trail/Bridge project; and the Allen Street project.

Mr. Leif appreciated learning that in order to receive State funding, there needs to be a synergy between their projects and projects that the State is interested in funding; the actual priority list will follow that combination. Mr. Leif said there could be projects important to them that do not meet the Complete Streets criteria that could still be funded through a warrant article or some other way. Ms. Connors agreed, funding could be available through Town appropriation or ARPA funds.

Mr. Leif asked when that list will be submitted to the State for funding.

Ms. Connors said since the next round of funding for construction is in May, they want to have the list finalized for MassDOT approval by January at the latest. The projects need to be ranked in time to be brought before the Board of Selectmen for approval on the prioritization plan and prior to filing with Mass DOT; the MassDOT vetting process may take a few months.

Old/New Business: Letters of Support for CPA Applications for the Aqueduct Multi-Use Trail Feasibility Study, Dog Park, Senior Center ADA Trail

Multi-Use Trail Feasibility Study—Ms. Poretsky said she and Ms. Davies drafted an application for CPA funding of the Multi-Use Trail Feasibility study; additionally, they plan to request ARPA funds. The trail runs 6.6 miles along the Aqueduct to Berlin. Trail improvements would allow for ADA compliant, safe pedestrian access.

Mr. Campbell said that application is on Open Space's October 24 meeting agenda. He believed Open Space would agree to sponsor it but that it hasn't been formalized yet.

Mr. Leif said it seemed natural for the MPIC to support this feasibility study since this project is in line with suggestions that came out of the development of the Master Plan itself.

Mr. Leif said he would entertain a motion that the MPIC indicates its support for a feasibility study for the Aqueduct Multi-Use Trail; Ms. Hirsh: so moved. Roll call vote was as follows: Ms. Poretsky-yes; Ms. Milton, yes; Ms. Cammarano-yes; Ms. Bakstran-yes; Mr. Kennedy-yes; Ms. Cahill-yes; Mr. Campbell-yes; Mr. DiMare-yes; Mr. Leif-yes.

Dog Park—Ms. Connors said that a presentation and public information session was recently held for the proposed dog park at which four sites were presented as a future home. Two sites were in neighborhoods, one was at the Senior Center, and one at Boundary Street. The Boundary Street location was the top choice that they are moving ahead with. Weston and Sampson performed the feasibility study and have been hired for the preliminary design stage, which she anticipated would be completed by Town Meeting. Ms. Connors plans to apply for grants from the Stanton Foundation to pay the balance of design costs as well as preparation of the bid documents. The Stanton Foundation will pay up to 90% of the construction costs up to \$225K; this foundation provides funding for ten dog parks per year in Massachusetts. Because construction costs have increased since the pandemic, Ms. Connors didn't believe \$225K will cover the anticipated costs so the goal is to request CPA funding to serve as a match for Stanton Foundation money.

Mr. Leif said their purpose tonight is to indicate if this committee confirms that the Master Plan isolated this as being important and should go forward. It is up to CPC to see if they can fund it.

Mr. Leif said he would entertain a motion that the Master Plan Implementation Committee indicates its support for the Dog Park project. Ms. Hirsh: so moved. Roll call vote was as follows: Mr. Campbell-yes; Ms. Hirsh-yes; Ms. Poretsky-yes; Ms. Milton-yes; Ms. Cammarano-yes; Ms. Bakstran-yes; Mr. Kennedy-yes; Ms. Cahill-abstain; Mr. Leif-yes; Mr. DiMare-yes.

Senior Center ADA Trail— Ms. Connors is planning to apply for CPC funds for the bid documents and the construction of an ADA compliant trail. Last year, CPC funding paid for Weston and Sampson to do a final design of the ADA trails but costs have increased by approximately \$100K since then. She will also be seeking alternative funding sources.

Mr. Leif said that he would entertain a motion that the MPIC indicates its support for the Senior Center ADA Trail; Mr. Campbell: so moved. Roll call vote was as follows: Ms. Hirsh-yes; Ms. Poretsky-yes; Ms. Milton-yes; Ms. Cammarano-yes; Ms. Bakstran-yes; Mr. Kennedy-yes; Ms. Cahill-yes; Mr. Leif-yes; Mr. Campbell-yes; Mr. DiMare-yes.

Ms. Connors thanked the committee for its support.

Minutes from September 15, 2022

Ms. Poretsky made a motion to accept the minutes. Ms. Hirsh seconded. Roll call vote was as follows: Ms. Hirsh-yes; Ms. Poretsky-yes; Ms. Milton-yes; Ms. Cammarano-yes; Ms. Bakstran-yes; Mr. Kennedy-yes; Ms. Cahill-abstain; Mr. Leif-yes; Mr. Campbell-yes; Mr. DiMare-yes.

Any Other Business That May Come Before the Committee

Mr. Leif believed Ms. Hirsh would like to continue an earlier discussion.

Ms. Hirsh was in agreement with Mr. DiMare regarding being allowed to view the pre-meetings being held remotely via Zoom between staff, Weston and Sampson, Mr. Leif and Ms. Davies.

Mr. Leif reiterated his concern about possibly violating Open Meeting Laws.

Ms. Connors said these are strategy meetings, they are preparing what will be presented publicly at the MPIC Committee meeting later that week.

Ms. Bakstran didn't think those meetings were being held differently than the pre-application meetings staff have with applicants. While she was on the Master Plan Steering Committee, she and Mr. Leif met regularly with staff and consultants, she didn't recall members asking to be included. She suggested leaving that to Mr. Leif and Ms. Davies to decide if there is merit to it.

Mr. DiMare said it just needs to be viewable to MPIC members and limited to less than a quorum. 'Whoever calls in first' gets to watch. Mr. Campbell said that was not practical.

Ms. Hirsh felt it could be worked out, although admittedly she didn't understand the technology. She thought the Zoom invitation could be sent to members with the understanding that they are just observing. Mr. Campbell reminded her that it still counts as participating in a meeting.

Ms. Hirsh suggested having an alternate or two in place during those times that either Mr. Leif or Ms. Davies was not available to participate in the prep meetings.

Mr. Leif said that having himself and Ms. Davies participate in the prep meetings was a way to make this committee feel comfortable they had representation behind the scenes, since it isn't possible to have the entire committee participate outside of the regular meetings due to the size of the committee and Open Meeting Law requirements. The idea behind the prep meeting is to plan the agenda and ensure that everyone is in sync with what will be discussed. If there was a meeting that both he and Ms. Davies couldn't attend, it would be rescheduled.

Ms. Davies arrived. She said she might have missed some of Ms. Hirsh's comments, but that she agreed with Mr. Leif, they don't discuss anything substantive, it is for the purpose of planning the agenda and making the best use of everyone's time.

Mr. Kennedy said this committee was made aware tonight that the update with the consultant will be the first agenda item each month and that Ms. Connors will share information with the committee as it becomes available to her, which he felt is suitable to him as an MPIC member. Staff needs time to do their work and as committee members, they have access to staff, the Chair and Vice-Chair, if they have questions or concerns between meetings. He has no issue with operating as they have been, he appreciated the coordination that came out of those meetings.

Mr. Leif noted that early on, they decided not to appoint a subcommittee to manage this project because it would be difficult to meet more frequently than once a month but if substantive issues come up that require the whole committee's input, they will call additional meetings.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for November 17.

Ms. Bakstran made a motion to adjourn, Ms. Cammarano seconded the motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Ms. Bakstran-yes; Ms. Cammarano-yes; Ms. Hirsh-yes; Ms. Poretsky-yes; Ms. Milton-yes; Ms. Davies-yes; Ms. Milton-yes; Mr. Kennedy-yes; Ms. Cahill-yes; Mr. Leif-yes; Mr. Campbell-yes; Mr. DiMare-yes.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:34pm.

Respectfully Submitted By
Michelle Cilley, Board Secretary