



TOWN OF NORTHBOROUGH Master Plan Implementation Committee

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**Master Plan Implementation Committee Meeting
December 15, 2022
Zoom Meeting Minutes
Approved January 19, 2023**

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

Ms. Davies, Vice-Chair, opened the remote meeting. Ms. Davies 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. Ms. Davies 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. She added that ensuring public access does not ensure public participation unless such participation is required by law. Ms. Davies noted that this meeting will not allow for Public Comment. She indicated that the public may view the meeting via the link as listed on the posted agenda.

Members Present, remotely: Ashley Davies, Vice-Chair; Julianne Hirsch, Amy Poretsky, Millie Milton, Fran Bakstran, Gene Kennedy, John Campbell, Dario DiMare

Others Present, remotely: Laurie Connors, Planning Director; Johnathan Law, Weston and Sampson; Russell Archambault, RKG Associates

The meeting opened at 7:00pm.

Discussion with Consultant Regarding Downtown Revitalization Strategy & Design Report

Mr. Law provided a brief update regarding steps taken since the November meeting.

Project Schedule—Community engagement has been a big component in the last month or so. They will move into conceptual plan development after the holidays.

Overview of Final Survey Results—Results have been collated from the online survey that was closed on December 2. There were 635 responses, mostly from residents who own property in Town. Mr. Law noted that many skipped the question that asked, 'If you do not like going downtown, please tell us why'. When asked 'What type of development services does downtown need more/less of', answers pointed mostly to retail, restaurants, drinking establishments, farmers markets. Top priorities were for more cafes and bakeries, more streetscape improvements, more benches, wider sidewalks, improvements to storefronts, the need to fill empty spaces, walkability.

Town to complete traffic counts in early January 2023—The Town has decided to ask CMRPC to do the traffic counts for free. Results will be sent to Weston and Sampson to compile, analyze and provide recommendations. Those counts will be used to open discussions with MassDOT and help conceptualize how they move forward for the Downtown plan.

Update from RKG on Stakeholder engagement—Discussions have been held with John Coderre, Michelle Gillespie and Tim Shay, still trying to get in touch with Chris Singas.

Mr. Archambault, RKG Associates, next shared some of the stakeholder engagement. Downtown issues that arose out of those conversations included: disruptive traffic on Route 20 in mornings and evenings; traffic on a major commuter route from those who are not necessarily there to partake in the Downtown; pedestrians don't feel safe in an area dominated by vehicles; parking doesn't seem to be where people would like it to be; a variety of gas stations along Main Street create potential redevelopment issues; skepticism regarding potential changes along Main Street as it relates to parking, width of the road, and speed of vehicles; the river is viewed as an asset despite it not being very visible and/or accessible; and a desire to see a comprehensive revitalization effort, that has a management component.

Mr. Archambault said one of the areas of RKG's expertise is understanding downtown markets in terms of the demand for businesses; what people want to do, what recruitment opportunities exist to bring/start new business and to support what currently exists. While the location of Northborough in the context of the Greater Boston area is an advantage, more discussion needs to happen to determine how the Downtown could change to better serve people's needs. What the community wants to allow in the Downtown needs to be determined; the underlying assumption is that there could be changes that could occur over a period of time depending on where the community wants to go. They will have completed a full assessment of that when this study has been completed. Some believe the Downtown is a reasonable place to live for certain people, but the addition of more entertainment, restaurants, shopping should be considered.

The area around the building at 4 West Main Street was discussed. That building and surrounding properties could offer significant opportunities for the Downtown, and has the potential to return to Town ownership in the near future. Mr. Archambault said that whatever happens there should be the centerpiece of what occurs Downtown and draws people to it.

Mr. Law indicated what the next steps are: RKG will continue market analysis interviews; separate workshops for business owners and the community-at-large need to be scheduled; traffic counts will begin in early January, which is to be coordinated by the Town.

Scheduling of tentative workshop dates was discussed. Ms. Connors suggested having the community workshop during their next regularly scheduled MPIC meeting date on January 19 and thought they would benefit more having that meeting in-person rather than virtually.

Mr. Archambault thought a morning workshop would probably work best for the business community, although he was unsure of his availability for early-mid January.

Ms. Poretsky wanted to keep January 19th for discussion with the consultants. She thought it would be more beneficial to have the public meeting sooner and have the opportunity for discussion of those results at the January meeting. Mr. Archambault was concerned about the timing and advance preparation needed. Mr. Law thought it was doable, they are basically gathering information, with probably four consultants from Weston and Sampson present.

Ms. Hirsh felt that in order to get as much participation as possible, they should have a hybrid meeting.

Ms. Davies said this idea had been discussed and the consensus was that there is greater ability to receive feedback in a multi-faceted way in an in-person meeting, although input provided virtually will be a little more limited. Ms. Bakstran thought a hybrid model was the fairest way to reach as many people as possible but not ideal for those participating remotely; she also did not want to use one of their MPIC meeting nights because it wouldn't be until February that they could discuss the results. Ms. Davies and Mr. DiMare were in agreement about a hybrid model.

Mr. Archambault said questions or exercises could be prepared for people participating remotely that those participating in person could respond to as well.

Since members did not want to have the community session occur on a meeting date, other dates were discussed with consideration given to time needed for advertising and collation of the results before a subsequent MPIC meeting. Members chose to have the public session on January 19 and the MPIC meeting on January 26. A 6:30pm start time was determined. Mr. Law asked about the location; Ms. Connors believed the high school would be the only location able to accommodate a hybrid meeting. The library was discussed. Ms. Connors will check availability. Ms. Davies said the cafeteria may be another option. Once both the location and the availability to having a hybrid meeting have been confirmed, Mr. Law will arrange to have a flyer produced.

Members next discussed scheduling of the workshop with the business owners. Ms. Connors asked Mr. Archambault his opinion on what might work best. Mr. Archambault deferred to Ms. Milton. Ms. Milton said it's probably dependent on the industry but that a lot of restaurants can be closed on Mondays or Tuesdays, or at least a slower day. Dates were discussed. Tuesday, February 7 was tentatively scheduled, 60-90 minutes, most likely a small group; Ms. Connors suggested having the meeting downtown, perhaps in Town Hall, but there would not be the ability to have a hybrid model there so it would be in person. Mr. Archambault can provide a briefing memo or something similar to share in advance regarding the information that will be presented.

Ms. Connors said she planned to go door-to-door to invite the various business owners in the Downtown focus area. She appreciated any help with that as it is a big effort; Ms. Milton volunteered. The flyer was discussed. Contact information for both Ms. Connors and Mr. Archambault will be included so those unable to attend the meeting have their contact details.

Ms. Hirsh had a question for the consultants regarding White Cliffs. Three proposals have been received for that building. How does this group make sure that group does not plan the same kind of thing for 4 West Main Street? Ms. Connors said it is important to let the White Cliffs Committee do its due diligence. She suggested taking a 'wait and see' approach and possibly in February there will be a firmer grasp on what the ultimate use of White Cliffs will be. Ms. Davies thought the role of this committee is to remind that committee what is applicable within the Master Plan; ultimately the White Cliffs Committee will make the final decision.

Mr. Law said if the decision on White Cliffs is made before they submit their final master plan, they will utilize that information to develop their final master plan for the Downtown.

Mr. Campbell asked if any more stakeholder interviews will be scheduled. Mr. Archambault said they are waiting to connect with Mr. Singas, he can reach out to others if that is what the committee prefers. As he does his research, he will also be contacting people who understand the local real estate market. Mr. Campbell had several questions; what was anticipated in the

final conclusions to include specific initiatives to businesses and land owners about developing in a certain way that contributes to your conclusions about Downtown; and do you anticipate your analysis to say to the Town, in order to accomplish goals a-b-c, you may need to acquire certain properties; are those conclusions that you anticipate drawing? Mr. Archambault said absolutely, if there is a kernel of opportunity that needs to be explored and vetted, they can start that process, although they might come to that conclusion. There is a difference between business owners and merchants and the people that may be leasing their property to those folks, they will be talking to some of those, they may have plans regarding the long-term viability of their property, and may need to redevelop that property; their input is important because they make decisions that could change the whole complexion of the Downtown.

Update on Status of Complete Streets Prioritization Plan--Board of Selectmen Update Scheduled for December 19th

Ms. Connors said they have gone through the vetting process with Woodward and Curran and staff (herself, Scott Charpentier and Fred Litchfield) and have come up with a numbered list of projects which will be presented to the BOS on Monday. They took the criteria, categorized each project based on that criteria, reviewed their listing, compared to the input received from the public and the Complete Streets forum, survey results, and vetted based on projects currently in the queue. Projects having a strong likelihood of being funded with grant money were ranked higher than others. There were adjustments that reflect those additional steps. Assuming they get that blessing, they will submit the prioritization plan to MassDOT for final approval, which needs to be done by December 31, which is the deadline for completion of the technical assistance grant.

Minutes from November 17, 2022

Ms. Hirsh made a motion to approve the minutes from November. Ms. Bakstran seconded. Roll call was as follows: Ms. Hirsh—aye; Ms. Bakstran—aye; Ms. Poretsky—aye; Mr. Kennedy—aye; Mr. Campbell—abstain; Mr. DiMare—abstain.

Any other business that may come before the Committee

Ms. Poretsky asked who was doing the traffic counts. Ms. Connors said the CMRPC will do those at no cost.

Ms. Hirsh asked if those traffic counts and analysis will consider the new fire station. Ms. Connors said the traffic counts will be based on actual traffic data and turning movements. Weston and Sampson will analyze that data, and she imagined they will include a future build condition. They are aware a new fire station will be built.

Ms. Poretsky asked if Mr. Archambault will prepare a feasibility study for 4 West Main Street as part of the Downtown study or just market analysis of the businesses Downtown. Ms. Connors said they are doing a market analysis to help determine what types of uses are competitive and would do well, what the capture area will be.

Next Meeting—January 26, 7pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:11pm.

Respectfully Submitted By

Michelle Cilley, Board Secretary