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By Karen Wilber/Assistant Town Clerk at 11:34 am, Jun 07, 2023

# TOWN OF NORTHBOROUGH

Master Plan Implementation Committee  
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**Master Plan Implementation Committee Meeting**  
**March 16, 2023**  
**Zoom Meeting Minutes**  
**Approved May 11, 2023**

**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; Amy Poretsky, Millie Milton, Tracey Cammarano, Fran Bakstran, Gene Kennedy, Dario DiMare, Jeanne Cahill, John Campbell.

**Others Present, remotely:** Laurie Connors, Planning Director; Johnathan Law and Melissa Green, Weston and Sampson; Russell Archambault, RKG.

The meeting opened at 7:00pm.

**Discussion with Consultant Regarding Downtown Revitalization Strategy & Design Report —**  
Mr. Law provided an overview of actions taken since the last MPIC meeting:

- The project is anticipated to be done at the end of May instead of April due to a delay in receiving traffic counts. Staff will assist with counts for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Master Planning Study has begun with the completion of the Master Plan conceptual bubble diagram. The Master Plan will be presented at the next public meeting and will have some detail while still being open for interpretation.
- RKG determined the key redevelopment catalyst areas based on feedback received at the public meetings and online surveys. Those areas consist of riverfront residential mixed-use, entertainment/dining/residential, commercial mixed-use, and shopping services.
- A slide was shared showing prominent buildings to remain in the Downtown, with some of those planned to be repurposed, such as Town Hall and the Fire Station.

Mr. Law said that the Master Plan bubble diagram concept was created based on information received from online surveys and from the first community meeting, taking into consideration the key redevelopment areas. The traffic data will be incorporated after it has been analyzed. Once they have buy-in on this concept, they will begin to design what those areas will look like. Hypothetical scenarios of different types of developments were discussed. Mr. Leif commented

that questions regarding acquiring property are premature. Mr. Archambault stated that there is an assumption that the Town will play a role in acquiring certain key properties, but the success of the plan is based on if they can get momentum behind a redevelopment with some of those sites changing hands over time through other means and not involving the Town.

Ms. Poretsky mentioned a business on Pierce Street with property located along the river that she'd learned was in dispute. She suggested if that land was owned by the Town, perhaps a bridge could be constructed to provide neighborhoods in the Whitney Street area with a connection to the Downtown. Mr. Leif said that area could provide a greater connection between Church Street and the river, depending on the outcome of the dispute.

Ms. Bakstran commented that Harvey's recently sold their business on Main Street and that perhaps there is an opportunity for development there. She mentioned that River Street is already a cut-through and maybe residents of that street would appreciate an alternative cut-through option.

Ms. Cahill thought afternoon-early evening would be a more accurate time to assess pedestrian traffic since a high concentration of students are in the Downtown then; additionally, she felt that people won't be walking or biking until the weather is warmer. Ms. Connors said Weston and Sampson's traffic engineer had identified certain peak times when the vehicular traffic is heaviest to be 7:30-8:30am and 4:30-5:30pm and that the traffic counts were done in March to meet project deadlines.

Ms. Connors asked Mr. Archambault if a preferred building height had been ascertained, particularly along Route 20 and Blake Street. Mr. Archambault said it was dependent on what the massing will be, he anticipated the height to increase to 35'. Mr. DiMare thought that maximum height would be difficult to comply with if retail was located on the first floor since retail tends to have higher ceilings. Mr. Archambault said taller buildings require steel construction, which increases construction costs, which then leads to higher lease rates. He suggested that the committee consider rendering an opinion about whether that is sustainable at this location.

Mr. Kennedy believed the idea of having a bypass that included Pierce Street to Church Street worked against the idea of having a more walkable downtown. He thought the conceptual map should be extended to the west to include the parking available once the new fire station has been built. He suggested changing the circles on that map to ovals with possibly some overlap. Ms. Green suggested extending the boundary further to the west to encompass available parking there. Mr. Campbell noted that the addition of the Town Common added a new gathering spot, the new fire station will be added, and that there are some unused properties to consider.

Mr. Kennedy also suggested the creation of a map delineating Town-owned land in the Downtown, which would be beneficial to this Committee.

Mr. Campbell said he didn't think creation of a bypass through the Town's major intersection was realistic and was pessimistic that the results of the traffic study would provide much flexibility. He didn't know if the traffic data could lead them to ask for changes in the timing or locations of the traffic lights to help with the flow. Mr. Archambault said he felt the general feeling was that the level of traffic limits opportunities in that area and if traffic were to flow differently, it could be open to more pedestrian traffic.

Mr. Leif asked for feedback about the conceptual map. Mr. Campbell thought it was an excellent working tool for this Committee but thought that it needed to be clarified to better show common gathering areas in a color other than green, which to him denoted a park or open space. Mr. Archambault said that could be clarified.

Mr. Leif said they need to discuss the timing of the next community meeting and tasks to be done before. He asked if they should have Weston and Sampson come to their April meeting with a refined version of the map and schedule the community meeting after that.

Ms. Milton had a comment regarding the gathering space at Blake Street as shown on the conceptual map. Because of its proximity to the train tracks, she questioned how desirable that spot would be. Others commented that the train passes through only twice daily and contributes to the charm of the area. Mr. Archambault said that area is already park-like, that that may be the most that can be done in that location.

Ms. Poretsky said Ms. Hirsh had suggested advertising the next community meeting at Town Meeting. Mr. Leif liked that idea but noted they need to be careful about the impression they leave. Graphics to be used and possible map changes were discussed.

Meeting dates were discussed. The MPIC will meet on April 20 to review changes made to the graphics and to finalize the visual that will be provided at Town Meeting on April 24. Mr. Leif asked the consultants to provide any updated information to Ms. Connors several days before the April meeting to give committee members time to review it.

Mr. Kennedy noted that Wayland is initiating a planning process for their segment of Route 20 and wondered if those details could be investigated; Mr. Leif agreed.

**Discussion of Planning Director's Memo**—Ms. Connors discussed a memo she prepared for the Appropriations Committee at the Town Administrator's request regarding the Downtown Revitalization project and anticipated expenses. She expected that Weston and Sampson would help them identify a Phase One infrastructure project, which could consist of improvements to the road right-of-way, parking lots, and properties that the Town owns. The next step would depend on whether ARPA funds would be used for design, which would be the quickest route since they wouldn't have to wait for Town Meeting appropriation, wait to apply for next year's grants, and then go out to bid to select a designer. Ms. Connors believed a manageable construction project would be about \$2M; the associated design costs typically are 10% of that or \$200-\$250K. She anticipated the design process to take about a year and during that process, she could begin applying for construction funding. At an absolute minimum, she would request \$500K in matching funds but may need as much as \$1M depending on the type of project and availability of grant funds.

Mr. Leif understood that the total revitalization of the Downtown will be a long-term project, anything that can be done to improve Route 20 will take time and will be done in conjunction with the State. He wondered if they should consider beginning the revitalization effort with the redevelopment of the Blake Street and Pierce Street areas as those are more under Town control.

Ms. Connors said the private spaces will be a challenge unless the Town forms a Redevelopment Authority, which would be a separate entity with the power to borrow money and, when a property goes up for sale, act quickly to secure financing. A Town can't purchase property

without Town Meeting approval. She thought the best strategy was to encourage the private sector to redevelop or sell the properties to a developer willing to do so. Ms. Poretsky noted that the CMPRC is doing a façade plan with another town and maybe the MPIC should look into that. Ms. Connors said some communities are using ARPA funds for those projects. Discussion followed regarding a sign and facade program where there is the ability to have influence over design, with creation of a committee that approves applications and provides the ability to influence what type of signage is installed and what type of improvements are made; it is a low-cost program where they could make a difference with a much smaller dollar figure.

Ms. Cahill advocated for use of infrastructure money not for parking, but to develop walking paths and connectivity to bring residents to the Downtown. Ms. Connors mentioned she'd had experience with grant programs such as one called Shared Streets and Spaces Program where she was able to get funding for pocket parks and wayfinding signage.

Mr. Campbell asked if ARPA funds are a source for potential facade improvement should the MPIC quantify it and make a formal request, since the BOS recently indicated they wanted to save ARPA funds for certain things as yet undefined. Ms. Connors said she'd submitted a suggestion to the Town Administrator several months ago that \$250K be allocated for that purpose but she wasn't sure if that had been forwarded to the BOS for consideration. That could be added to the agenda for the next MPIC meeting for discussion. Mr. Leif agreed.

Ms. Poretsky asked if the \$250K for the design could be requested from ARPA funds. Ms. Connors said she was aware there are a lot of requests for ARPA funding and there is the possibility of asking for municipal appropriation for the seed money for construction. She will need \$500K at least for a match in order to apply for grant money. Mr. Leif thought once they get further down the path on what the recommendations are going to look like, the MPIC might be in a better position to leverage Weston and Sampson's recommendations into a further request for ARPA money, but to consider starting with what Ms. Connors had submitted to the Town Administrator.

Mr. Leif thought the pace would move quickly after the MPIC's April meeting, from working with conceptual ideas to specific tasks. They need to see what comes out of the traffic study and what they hear at the next community meeting. Their work with Weston and Sampson can continue beyond April, there are certain deliverables still to be met.

Discussion followed regarding the scheduling of the next visioning exercise.

**Minutes from February 16, 2023**—Ms. Poretsky made a motion to accept the minutes as written. Ms. Milton seconded. All were in favor.

**Upcoming MPIC Meeting**—The next meeting is scheduled for April 20. Mr. Leif will be away, but Ms. Davies will chair that meeting.

There were no further items for discussion.

Ms. Cammarano made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Milton seconded the motion. All were in favor.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:48pm.

Respectfully Submitted by Michelle Cilley, Board Secretary