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TOWN OF NORTHBOROUGH

Master Plan Implementation Committee
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Master Plan Implementation Committee Meeting

June 15, 2023

Zoom Meeting Minutes

Approved October 19, 2023

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

Mr. Leif, Chair, opened the remote meeting. Mr. Leif stated that this Open Meeting of the Master Plan Implementation Committee was conducted remotely pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023, An Act Relative to Extending Certain COVID-19 Measures Adopted During the State of Emergency, signed into law on March 29, 2023. All members of the Master Plan Implementation Committee were allowed and encouraged to participate remotely. 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 and ensuring public access does not ensure public participation unless such participation is required by law. This meeting will not allow for Public Comment. 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; Amy Poretsky, Millie Milton, Julianne Hirsch, Gene Kennedy, Dario DiMare, John Campbell.

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

The meeting started at 7:00pm.

Discussion with Consultant Regarding Format of Community Meeting #3—Mr. Law shared some of the slides to be used in the next community meeting. One slide showed the different building types that could be potentially used. Another slide showed an existing building in the Downtown with improvements made to the exterior, some of which included: restoration of the brick to its original color; awnings and planters at the building's entrance; window detailing; color texture to accentuate the doorways. Mr. Leif wanted it to be noted that the building used for this example is privately owned. Perhaps over time, the Town could work with the owners of that building, among others, to see if they'd be willing to make some changes to the façade.

An image of a corner gas station was shared to show how plantings and trees provide screening to make it more aesthetically pleasing. Mr. Leif added, to the extent that this or other areas Downtown are located within the public right-of-way, that this was something the Town could take action on in the short term. Mr. DiMare asked if permission was needed to do so. Ms. Connors said MassDOT owns the Route 20 right-of-way. Mr. Law added that MassDOT is advocating Complete Streets design principles; if planting trees doesn't impact sight lines, he didn't expect negative comments. Mr. Leif suggested the report indicate some public spaces as being good initial areas to start beautification and asked Ms. Connors to work with Mr. Law and Ms. Greene to call those out. Ms. Poretsky wondered if local companies would consider an 'Adopt a Corner' program.

A 'fly-through' graphic of Scenario 3 was shared. Similar presentations of the other scenarios will be presented at the upcoming community meeting. Mr. Leif said he will reinforce that most of what is being shown is privately owned property and that it is not the Town's intention to take over any of that property; the intention is to create an environment which will attract developers to come in and help develop this plan over time. He added that it is important for people to understand that they will try to foster these concepts but what will eventually be built will depend on private developers and negotiating with the Town's permitting authorities.

Discussion with Consultant Regarding Outline of Downtown Revitalization Strategy & Design Report—Ms. Green presented a draft outline of what the report will look like. Mr. Leif requested that the introduction reference the parts of the Master Plan that recommended the report. The outline indicated topics to be covered in the report: the purpose and need for the plan; existing conditions analysis; infrastructure assessment; Downtown traffic volumes and movements; and Downtown market analysis. The report will move on to downtown revitalization analysis and revitalization strategy recommendations. Discussion followed.

Ms. Connors was concerned about meeting the expectations of this committee in completing tasks in the timeframes discussed, due to her workload and being the staff liaison to other boards and committees. Mr. Leif suggested the report say that the rollout of the revitalization is dependent on the ability of the staff to work on it, and that they recommend creation of a full-time staff position to handle economic development activities. Ms. Hirsh asked if it would be a contractual position or permanent. Ms. Connors said the health of the downtown is a constant task.

Mr. Kennedy thought there was going to be something in the final report that evaluates the existing Downtown zoning and matches it to the redevelopment plans and the marketing studies done by RKG to come up with some generalized recommendations about what needs to be done to make this a reality. Ms. Green said it will be included in the discussion regarding redevelopment opportunities in the different scenarios. Mr. Kennedy asked how they can address the parcels in the Downtown that do not fall into any of those redevelopment scenarios, the plan can't focus on just the three redevelopment areas without addressing Downtown more broadly, and something should be said about the beautification of Main Street.

Mr. Leif mentioned an email received from Norm Corbin, Chair of the Historic District Commission, in which he'd asked if the report will indicate that the Town should continue to consider how to preserve the historic nature of the older homes east of the Town's center. Mr. Kennedy suggested that there may be zoning incentives that could be employed to encourage the retention of those historic properties. Mr. Leif didn't think the report had to go into significant detail about how to do that, but it should mention that it is important to keep it in mind, and even though they are not looking at redevelopment in that area, the Town should consider how it's going to maintain that section of Main Street.

Mr. DiMare asked if aesthetics would be called out; several comments were made at the last meeting requesting that the Town have a quaint look. Ms. Connors said her interpretation of this report is that it is specifically for revitalization of the Downtown, these recommendations are not townwide. She thought it should be clear in the report that a unique character is needed to achieve a sense of arrival in the Downtown. Mr. DiMare agreed that the scope is about Downtown, but he wasn't sure if the look they are trying to establish for that area was going to

be implemented townwide to be consistent. Mr. Leif said for the purpose of this report, unless members disagreed, that they need to focus on the study areas mentioned in the report.

Mr. Law thought a draft of the report could be forwarded in about six weeks and after receiving comments and changes, they would provide the final draft.

Mr. Leif discussed a tentative summer meeting schedule. The purpose of a meeting in August would be to focus on the preliminary report with the possibility of presenting it to the Select Board in the fall. Several members mentioned possible conflicts with summer vacation plans, so Mr. Leif asked Ms. Connors to email members for their availability in August.

Next discussed was the subject of presenting housing at the next community meeting. Mr. Law said since they've reduced building heights in two scenarios, 300+ units of housing was no longer being considered, but he wasn't sure what that number was yet. Mr. Leif thought that they should say that based on the reduction of building heights and other factors, the amount of housing anticipated will be less than previously discussed; however, that is dependent over time on what developers want to do and what the permitting authorities are comfortable permitting. Ms. Connors felt it was important that the RKG component of the report discuss how many units in general are necessary to support a certain amount of business, there is a direct relationship between the two.

Ms. Poretsky thought that if developers profited enough from apartments that commercial development wouldn't be a priority for them and it wouldn't be built. Mr. Kennedy said the economic development part of the report is supposed to explain that; if the mixed-use concept isn't working, the report should identify that, and it should be reflected in the Downtown Revitalization plan.

Old/New Business

- **Update on Request for ARPA Funding for Downtown Sign & Façade Program**—Ms. Connors had begun drafting a letter to the Select Board that she hoped to submit shortly which would explain the program and provide suggestions for how it could operate.
- **Election of Officers, Chair and Vice Chair**—Mr. Leif was willing to continue as Chair. Ms. Davies had indicated to Mr. Leif that she would rather not continue as Vice Chair based on other commitments. Mr. Campbell nominated Mr. Leif as Chair. Ms. Hirsh seconded. Roll call vote followed, all were in favor. Ms. Poretsky nominated Ms. Hirsh as Vice Chair. Ms. Davies seconded. Mr. Campbell questioned whether it was appropriate for a member of the Select Board to have that role and meant no disrespect to Ms. Hirsh. Mr. Leif asked Ms. Connors if she was aware of issues with that, Ms. Connors was not aware. Roll call vote followed, all were in favor.
- **Minutes from May 18th**—Mr. DiMare made a motion to approve those minutes. Ms. Hirsh seconded. Roll call vote followed, all were in favor with two abstentions (Ms. Poretsky and Ms. Cahill).
- **Upcoming MPIC Meetings, July 20, August 17**—no meeting will be held in July; the August 17 will be rescheduled pending availability.
- **Discussion of Meeting Virtually Versus In-Person**—This conversation will be continued to another time when more information is known about the possibility of hybrid meetings.

There was no new business. Mr. DiMare made a motion to adjourn; Ms. Poretsky seconded. Roll call vote followed, all were in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 8:51pm.

Respectfully Submitted by Michelle Cilley, Board Secretary