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TOWN OF NORTHBOROUGH Master Plan Implementation Committee
Town Hall Offices • 63 Main Street • Northborough, MA 01532 • 508-393-5040 x7 • 508-393-6996 Fax

**Master Plan Implementation Committee Meeting
November 16, 2023
Zoom Meeting Minutes
Approved as Amended on December 21, 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 did not allow for Public Comment. The public had access to view the meeting via the link on the posted agenda.

Members Present, remotely: Rick Leif, Chair; Julianne Hirsh, Vice Chair; Amy Poretsky, Millie Milton, Fran Bakstran, Gene Kennedy, Jeanne Cahill, Jen Tolman, Tracey Cammarano (arrived at 7:55pm).

Others Present, remotely: Laurie Connors, Planning Director.

The meeting started at 7:00pm.

Discussion of the November 9, 2023 Draft of the Downtown Revitalization Plan & Executive Summary—Mr. Leif said the purpose of the meeting wasn’t to approve the plan but to get consensus on the next steps. The plan will ultimately be presented to the Select Board.

Mr. Leif said the consultants formed their recommendations based on their experience and professional judgement; however, input received in public meetings and in discussions with this Committee showed there isn’t universal agreement about much of the plan. Mr. Leif felt the plan should be submitted with its major recommendations intact; the executive summary addresses the fact that there are differences of opinion with housing and with the order of priority of what should be done. When the plan is presented to the Select Board, the Town will need to decide how to go forward and determine how to resolve the differences of opinion and come to some agreement, which will be a combination of concurrence between the Select Board and land use boards, as well as more input from the citizenry at large. Mr. Leif asked for feedback.

Ms. Hirsh said they need to understand the significance of this report and what legal implications may exist, if any.

Ms. Connors said many planning documents just sit on the shelf, which could be the future of this plan, or it could be implemented to a certain degree. She felt if there was interest in going forward with the plan, that the development community may be motivated to do something

consistent with the plan believing that this is the Town's vision. If they file a development plan consistent with this document which ends up being denied, then they will likely get ~~more~~ frustrated and walk away. The Town won't be at risk of being sued, but it would be a shame to have spent \$150,000 of taxpayer money and have gone through this planning process to end up with no consensus.

Ms. Bakstran believed they should accept the recommendations made by the professionals but that it is up to them as citizens and members of various boards to act on the priorities. The plan should be handed off to the Select Board so that the MPIC can begin looking at other aspects of the Master Plan.

Ms. Poretsky was concerned about how the plan could be used to force the hand of the Planning Board. She said that amendments to the groundwater bylaw had been proposed to the Planning Board and that the reasoning given for the change was that the current bylaws are an impediment to the type of high-density development desired by residents during the Downtown Revitalization visioning exercises. Ms. Poretsky said she didn't hear the residents calling for high-density development during the visioning exercises but felt this plan was already being used as a tool to change zoning.

Ms. Connors followed up on Ms. Poretsky's comments regarding the proposed amendments to the groundwater bylaw and explained the need for updating that bylaw in the areas of Downtown Business, Downtown Neighborhood, and Main Street Residential. The minimum lot sizes required by the underlying zoning districts are impossible to achieve because most of the land in these districts is located within Area 2 and Area 3 of the Groundwater Protection Overlay District and is subject to a mandatory upsize requirements. This means that the minimum lot size for most of the land in the Downtown Business District is not 4,000 square feet as stated in the dimensional table adopted by the Town in 2009. It's really 40,000 and 20,000 square feet because of the Overlay District. She pointed out that the entire downtown has access to public sewer so the mandatory upsize requirement is unnecessary.

Ms. Cahill said she was considering the opposition to the housing emphasis. In looking back at the survey results, she commented that five housing categories received between 10-25% of respondents thinking there should be more housing in the Downtown. She felt they have to look to what the community wants in addition to what they think is doable.

Ms. Milton said they can modify the plan or do it in pieces. Consistency of design is desired, with a quaint New England look and a vibrant downtown, which could be balanced through planning, zoning and design, and that moving the plan forward was the next big step. She felt the amount of existing municipal parking in the Downtown as described in the plan, particularly at the library, was misleading. She asked for the definition of high-density housing.

Availability of municipal parking at the library and Town Hall was discussed. Ms. Connors said the ITE book defines high density housing; she will find that definition and pass it along.

Mr. Kennedy said the scenarios presented at the end were basically the same as they were in the beginning, regardless of objections they'd raised, and that they'd included parking that was at least 50% less than what was required. He thought the executive summary was good although bordering on an apology for the consultants, which he thought might have a negative connotation that could be neutralized.

Ms. Tolman felt the plan needed to be teased apart and a sister plan written by the people who live in and know the Town.

Ms. Cammarano asked who is involved in championing these efforts; without that direction from the Town, it felt like they were passing the plan off into an abyss.

Mr. Leif felt that the Select Board, working in conjunction with the land use boards, will need to decide how to go forward; one of the recommendations of the plan is to hire a new staff position to take the lead. This committee has done what they had set out to do, they can agree or disagree to whatever extent they want to, but the plan lays out a vision and has parts which make sense.

Mr. Kennedy said Northborough has a small downtown and a small revitalization effort, but if in two to three years they see the old Town Hall, the old fire station, the current fire station, and the new fire station occupied, he would consider that a victory. The best parts of the plan will rise to the top, they will be implemented and pointed to as a success; they have that opportunity by virtue of the municipally owned property.

Mr. Leif said Blake Street has a lot of potential in the center of downtown to create an environment that he thought was in line with what people envisioned. The Harvey property was next discussed, and what redevelopment of that could entail. Mr. Leif thought that if housing isn't added there, residents would be in favor of an overall landscape plan for that property, with trails and a river walk. He discussed the possibility of purchasing the property with Community Preservation funds for open space preservation to turn it into a park.

Discussion followed. Members were asked to email Ms. Connors the top six priority recommendations, as listed in section seven of the Downtown Revitalization plan, that they think are the most important for the short term. She will compile those to show committee consensus, and those will be emphasized during the presentation as the next steps. An email will be sent to all MPIC members so that those not present tonight will have a chance to participate, and to send their suggestions in by November 28 to Ms. Connors.

The next MPIC meeting will be held on December 21st. Members should respond to Ms. Connors with final changes to the document (no major revisions) by November 29th, which she will compile and forward to Weston & Sampson, with the request to turn that around in a week so that the final version could be forwarded to members with time to review before December 21st. Mr. Leif asked Ms. Connors to be in touch with the Chair of the Select Board to schedule presentation of the plan to that board in January, and to allow for an hour.

Old/New Business, Minutes from October 19th—Ms. Poretsky had sent in some changes. Ms. Connors said she'd received an email about a typo also. Ms. Connors will incorporate those changes. Ms. Poretsky made a motion to accept the minutes as amended. Ms. Hirsh seconded. Roll call vote was taken, all were in favor.

There was no other business. Ms. Bakstran made a motion to adjourn, Ms. Milton seconded. Roll call vote followed, all were in favor. Meeting adjourned at 8:54pm.

Respectfully Submitted by Michelle Cilley, Board Secretary