



TOWN OF NORTHBOROUGH Master Plan Implementation Committee

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Master Plan Implementation Committee Meeting

January 20, 2022

Zoom Meeting Minutes

Approved February 17, 2022

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

Others Present, Remotely: John Coderre, Town Administrator; Scott Charpentier, Director of Public Works; Donny Goris-Kolb, VHB.

Meeting opened at 7:00pm.

Consideration of 12.15.21 Minutes—Members had several edits. Mr. Leif made a motion to accept the minutes as amended, Ms. Cahill seconded. Ms. Davies will forward edits to the Planning Admin.

Discussion on the Downtown Master Plan Bid Scope—Mr. Goris-Kolb had forwarded a scope of work to members. He clarified that this is just the scope of work, not the full RFP.

Mr. Goris-Kolb said the Master Plan put forth a goal to “enhance Downtown by promoting a pleasing and welcoming appearance – one that promotes a sense of place – enabling it to become the community’s proud central gathering area for residents and visitors alike.” The support action is to conduct a design study of the Downtown to help focus ideas and develop a clear vision for the area; this goal and this action is the impetus for this plan and this scope of work.

The scope had six tasks under which there were subtasks and deliverables. The six tasks are: Project Initiation and Management; Establish the Project Boundary; Analysis; Engagement and Communications; Visioning; and Implementation and Final Plan.

Discussion was opened to questions and comments from the board. Mr. Leif asked members to focus on the plan itself and not the deeper details; the goal here is to review this scope of work which will go into the RFP to consultants. Mr. Goris-Kolb agreed saying the goal tonight is to refine this document.

Mr. DiMare asked if a phasing plan will be part of the final report. Mr. Goris-Kolb said critical actions could be built into the implementation strategy and called out specifically in the scope of work.

Mr. Campbell wanted to address engagement with stakeholders, specifically local business owners and property owners, and how that ties to the strategy and the vision. Understanding that a private business owner keeping within zoning bylaws can do what they want, and the look of their property can look as they want, is within reason. Northborough has a diverse collection of buildings and businesses, some partially finished, some not started. There are some property owners taking advantage and not particularly keeping it in such a way that one might want envisioned it this sense of place; he wondered if

that needs to be a bigger part of the strategy. The look of sub villages can't be changed unless there is the consideration of possibly buying out properties, and what would the budget be for that? In one day of interviews, we can get feedback but how can we really expand on that partnership? He has seen it discussed but wondered how much more it could be tied into the plan, it is critical to changing the things that cannot be controlled compared to sidewalks, bike lanes, trees and plantings, which can be controlled.

Mr. Goris-Kolb said the vision that came out of the community is a desire for a certain look for the downtown, those diverse set of buildings are existing conditions that may work for or against that vision. He asked if this board is looking to get buy-in from property owners specifically on that vision to enable potential actions that may impact them in terms of their properties.

Mr. Campbell asked if it were fair to say that you would be presenting a vision that might not be implemented unless you asked a particular property owner if he was willing to sell if that cleared the path to changing the entire look of a particular section of town.

Mr. Goris-Kolb cautioned against having those types of concrete conversations as part of the planning process, but added that you can get their feedback on the vision.

Mr. Campbell said not all business owners are Northborough residents, he would like to consider a larger presence of the business and property owner input into the vision so that it aligns with the citizens. To do that without engaging those people that produce the revenue may be a little short-sighted.

Mr. Leif wanted to see a comparison of the vision to the reality and some recommendations about where there are potential issues, and what should the town do to resolve those differences.

Mr. Leif wanted to edit subtask 4.2 to read 'the consultant will conduct interviews' [rather than limit it to 'one day' of interviews]. Mr. Goris-Kolb agreed. Mr. DiMare suggested having the consultant provide hourly rates or unit prices per meeting which put them in control. Mr. Goris-Kolb said in another plan he had done, he had had eight individual interviews with multiple stakeholders in the same interview.

Mr. Campbell asked Mr. Goris-Kolb if he could suggest other ways to engage business owners and get direct feedback. Mr. Goris-Kolb said this is a scope of work to be determined by this committee, there are multiple ways of reaching out to individual stakeholders or stakeholder groups. He discussed his experience working with economic development roundtables where like-minded individuals had a larger group meeting that was facilitated by a few individual folks and broken out like a mini public meeting. Stakeholder interviews could be converted to two or three roundtables to have those conversations that are more focused.

Mr. Leif asked if they could simply ask for a response from the responder so they do not have to guess at the numbers. He asked for input from other committee members.

Mr. Goris-Kolb said RFP's run the gamut; they could be high-level and expect the consultant to provide the approach or they could be prescriptive.

Mr. Coderre suggested setting parameters, to pick a reasonable number of meetings and a schedule of costs for any additional services that might be added in the future, leaving it open could mean a \$40K difference in proposals just based on the number of meetings. He said this is a straight-forward scope of services which can be tweaked to gear it towards Northborough; the deliverables, the tasks, the processes laid out are what he would have anticipated.

Mr. Goris-Kolb said the 'up to' in that task could be changed to read 'at least' and then say you expect a certain number, if the consultant thinks more meetings will be necessary for the process, they can adjust their schedule of fee proposal. Mr. Leif felt that, in order to finalize this proposal, some of these numbers need to be filled in in terms of interviews and meetings.

Mr. Campbell felt it was ineffective to say one day of interviews; is there another way to quantify it? If is the phrasing 'at least,' that is fine, but it is probably unrealistic that would happen in one day.

Mr. DiMare suggested to put your best guess in so that the scope is clear for competitive bidding.

Ms. Hirsh thought eight meetings was reasonable going by the number of groups listed under that sub task. Ms. Davies agreed. Mr. Coderre suggested adding 'combined' ('The Consultant will conduct up to eight *combined* interviews...'); that way, you are saying that you can have multiple meetings with business owners, land owners, in a meeting, not combining everyone in each meeting. Mr. DiMare suggested adding a duration of time. Mr. Goris-Kolb said he has not seen RFP's prescribe that, typically meetings will be 45 minutes to an hour. Ms. Hirsh was not sure one hour was long enough. Ms. Davies said that this was really more about having the bids be equal so they can be measured against each other equally.

Mr. Leif wanted to go back to the number of meetings as listed under 4.1/Downtown Planning Committee. It made sense to him that at the end of each phase, that there would need to be a meeting between the consultant and the committee managing this. Mr. Goris-Kolb said he was seeing eight meetings: Kick-off; Project Boundary Refinement; Analysis Results; Public Meeting Prep/Interview Results (x2); Visioning Presentation and Feedback (x2); Review of the Draft Plan with Implementation Strategy. He noted that those meetings are usually 2 hours in length.

Ms. Davies thought it would be helpful to determine if there is going to be a downtown planning committee, or will it be a subcommittee of the master planning implementation committee? Or will the MPIC be heading up this effort? She asked Mr. Coderre for his thoughts on that.

Mr. Coderre believed that the creation of another downtown planning committee would have overlap with people from this committee. Given this committee's knowledge and background, it was reasonable to see this process through, and if that were so, he recommended that it be the full committee. He said that this committee has made great progress and he wanted to go before the Board of Selectmen to provide an update including what the scope looks like and what is being envisioned. If this committee were to shepherd this process through, it would be a reasonable request of the Board of Selectmen to modify the charge to take this through. Otherwise, a duplicated committee will be created, which, in his opinion, would make it more complicated than it needs to be.

Mr. Leif asked if residents and local business owners should be represented by an individual appointed by this committee. Mr. Coderre said this board does not have appointing authority, but that they would be involved in providing the input through the stakeholder meetings and interviews. He said if they want sitting members, then another committee would have to be created.

Ms. Cammarano said when this process was started, members were concerned about how long it would actually take to make changes with all of them wanting to be exponential in the changes being made. She felt their efforts would be duplicated with adding another committee and was comfortable with this committee taking on that role since they have already covered significant ground.

Mr. Kennedy believed they are focusing on a specific area and should include the people most affected by what is going to happen. He did not know about the mechanics but would like to see that happen.

Mr. Goris-Kolb said they could have more of the online surveys that could be more targeted as opposed to the general surveys which speak to the issue at hand.

He noted another consideration, task 2.0 refers to the project boundary; whatever committee is guiding this process is going to be guiding it from the onset, if the project boundary is not defined until task 2, then you do not know who is going to be within that project boundary or have that greater interest in the area.

Ms. Hirsh thought Mr. Kennedy had a great point and thought it could be solved with the stakeholder interviews. She asked, when the consultant does these interviews, can any of the members of the MPIC be involved in those? Mr. Coderre urged caution with respect to Open Meeting Law rules.

Mr. Goris-Kolb said in his past experience with stakeholder interviews, Town staff has joined if there was a specific area that a committee member had expertise in, to listen in, but he said that you do not want to overwhelm the participants. Mr. Coderre said that it did not need to be decided tonight. Ms. Davies worried about the possibility of stifling those conversations when members of the committee are present.

Ms. Davies asked if there will be an opportunity for these stakeholders to attend their meetings and provide comments, similar to when they were developing the Master Plan? Ms. Bakstran said they can attend these and participate in the public conversation.

Ms. Bakstran felt it was not a good idea to create a new committee. Ms. Davies or Mr. Leif could attend any one of these on this committee's behalf and bring it back so they are kept updated. She did not want them to don't forget there are five hundred additional pages of actions that she hoped to address during the yearlong process, or however long this one task will take.

Mr. Coderre said when you have a long list of priorities, the idea is to narrow it down to two or three at a time, and this committee has done that. These are big initiatives that will take a lot of staff time and resources and will be the focus for the next year, it does not mean that nothing else will get done. As he had explained at a previous meeting, there a lot of things that are occurring and will continue to go on that the committee will get updates on. As the person who has to manage the staff and the staff's workload, the MPIC cannot keep adding more large goals.

Ms. Davies asked if they needed to take a vote so that Mr. Coderre could bring it forward to the Board of Selectmen. She was not sure of the board's position.

Ms. Poretsky said that they have learned so much already, a new committee would have to start fresh.

Mr. Leif said he was ok with having this committee appointed as the committee overseeing this project. He hoped members realized the time commitment ahead.

Ms. Davies asked if they are saying this committee will be the downtown master planning committee and implementing those changes?

Mr. Coderre said down the road, the idea will be to create a permanent downtown committee, with a hand-off in the future. Ms. Davies thought those might be more populated by those stakeholders.

Mr. Coderre said that if there was consensus among the board to serve in that role, he will communicate the request to the Board of Selectmen to add that task to the committee's role. He did not think it was necessary to pass a motion that says something that can be agreed upon by consensus. No one spoke in opposition.

Mr. Leif wanted to go back to the scope, specifically 5.3/Roadway and Streetscape Design; at the minimum, this plan has to address how will the project be successful given that route 20 will be in the project boundary. He wanted that paragraph rewritten.

Ms. Davies said she did not see any way route 20 would not part of that, could the scope look at traffic flow and ways to suggest changes? Mr. Goris-Kolb said it is broken up in terms of the mobility analysis. This streetscape design will look at traffic and safety.

Mr. Kennedy did not see much reference to housing in the scope of work, and said when doing a downtown plan, the whole concept of bringing people to the downtown involves different densities, heights, mixed use, etc. He asked if the visual preference survey will include a review of housing types to get something from the respondent, or just design? Mr. Goris-Kolb said the market analysis will cover housing potential and look at the land use and zoning. Mr. Kennedy asked if there should be an implementation strategy added that is housing specific under 5.1 that reflects the consensus of the process as to what type of housing would be supportive of the downtown vision. Mr. Goris-Kolb said he will call it out.

Ms. Davies said she would love to see the same thing for commercial development but that is baked into urban development. She did not have anything against adding housing strategy, she did not want to confuse things. Mr. Goris-Kolb said that he could just augment this bullet point to call out housing.

Ms. Milton asked if parking and parking spaces for downtown use is included or was that too specific. Mr. Goris-Kolb said that is an additional study that will be addressed when they look at mobility analysis and strategy. Ms. Hirsh did not see why they could not include it here, parking is in an issue. Ms. Davies asked, in terms of cost and cost, is that a big ask? Mr. Charpentier asked Mr. Goris-Kolb if he has parking as part of the existing conditions and technical analysis. Mr. Goris-Kolb said yes, it is incorporated into this mobility analysis to a certain extent, parking studies include consultants measuring use, they can inventory parking spaces which could be part of this assessment but they would not do percent uses in time of day use, that parking utilization is a different component in a different study. They can characterize where the parking is and what the inventory looks like on-street versus off-street. Mr. Charpentier said then what could be a part of this downtown visioning study is identification of the need for a parking study in where the downtown boundaries are set and these are the needs and land uses suggested in that area, there is a shortage or there is not, relevant to parking. Mr. Goris-Kolb said there will be a parking component added to the design and development strategy as well.

Mr. Leif asked about 5.2/Illustrative Graphics, and if that would show where parking will be in the new downtown. He hoped to also see where the areas for retail and housing development might be. Mr. Goris-Kolb thought they would still be generalized depictions, you do not want to be too prescriptive, the streetscape will show more detail in terms of parking.

Mr. Goris-Kolb asked if Mr. Charpentier knew if a tree inventory had been done that could be leveraged for the assignment under 5.3/Roadway and Streetscape Design. Mr. Charpentier said no, the recommendation as part of the study report would be to incorporate species.

Mr. Leif said they still have determined a preliminary project boundary and wondered if that should be an agenda item for the next meeting. Mr. DiMare thought it was part of the study for them to identify natural and historic figures which would help give them the definition of the boundaries.

Mr. Goris-Kolb said yes, the role of the MPIC is to do some homework and come to that meeting with suggestions to aid the conversation.

Mr. Coderre asked if the MPIC needs to see the scope one more time or if they are comfortable with it. He could take that scope of services and place it in a template for an RFP.

Discussion followed. They are not at the point where they can take a vote. Members decided they wanted a chance to provide some written comments after this meeting.

Mr. Coderre said he will meet with the Financial Planning Committee to work this into the Capital Improvement Plan for the upcoming cycle, this has been put in as a placeholder.

Mr. Goris-Kolb will send out the most updated version to members. Comments should be in to Mr. Goris-Kolb by February 4. Ms. Cahill suggested sending comments to Mr. Leif and Ms. Davies, they can consolidate those and forward. Mr. Goris-Kolb will make those edits.

Mr. DiMare made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Leif seconded. All were in favor. Meeting adjourned at 9:05pm.

Old/New Business

- Next Meeting: The next meeting is scheduled for February 17, 2022.

Respectfully Submitted By
Michelle Cilley, Board Secretary