



TOWN OF NORTHBOROUGH

Master Plan Implementation Committee
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Master Plan Implementation Committee Meeting

May 26, 2022

Zoom Meeting Minutes

Approved as Amended on July 21, 2022

7:10 p.m. - Introduction to Remote Meeting

Ms. Poretsky opened the remote meeting as Ms. Davies was late. Ms. Poretsky stated that this Open Meeting of the Master Plan Implementation Committee was being conducted remotely consistent with Governor Baker's Executive Order of June 16, 2021, 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. Poretsky noted that the Order allows public bodies 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. Poretsky noted that this meeting will not allow for Public Comment. She indicated that the public may view the meeting as listed on the posted agenda.

Members Present, remotely: Ashley Davies, Chair; Rick Leif, Vice-Chair; Amy Poretsky, Eugene Kennedy, Julianne Hirsch, Tracey Cammarano, Dario DiMare, Jeanne Cahill.

Others Present, remotely: Laurie Connors, Town Planner; Scott Charpentier, Director of Public Works.

Update on RFP for Downtown Master Plan

Ms. Connors stated that she'd taken the major elements from VHB's proposal and left certain aspects open to interpretation by the respondents, details will be established once they have selected a consultant. Additionally, she'd added more detail to the design aspect of the RFP since she has gone through this before in Millbury and knows what the grant funders are looking for; she wanted to ensure that the design concept that is prepared is of sufficient detail that would allow them to get a design grant, should they decide to go forward with that.

Mr. Leif said that after he and Ms. Davies had been presented with the RFP that was prepared by Ms. Connors, they felt that the scope of services was formed quite a bit differently than discussed at their February meeting and made sense to have the committee take another look at it.

Ms. Hirsch appreciated the emphasis placed on public participation and the timeline proposed.

Mr. Leif mentioned that he and Ms. Davies were concerned that completion being proposed for March might be too late and could pose a problem getting on the 2023 Town Warrant. He said that Ms. Connors mentioned in her cover letter that by February the Town should know enough and could get cost estimates from the consultant if they needed to put anything into the warrant, which can be done even if the completion date of the actual analysis isn't done until March.

Mr. Kennedy thought they could provide a little more detail under Downtown Revitalization Design Concepts as a way to provide a little more direction to the consultants. Ms. Connors felt that if you provide

a very detail-oriented RFP, then you will get identical proposals with no alternative approaches. Mr. Kennedy felt they could provide more context by including some of the phrasing from the Implementation Strategy from the old draft, there are various objectives from the Master Plan that they'd wanted to see implemented Downtown. Ms. Connors said that she can include that information.

Mr. Leif asked if there are specific items Mr. Kennedy was looking to have included in the RFP.

Mr. Kennedy said they could leave Downtown Revitalization Design Concepts alone, but wished to add Land Use, Zoning, Circulation. Mr. Leif asked Mr. Kennedy to send Ms. Connors his proposed wording.

Ms. Cahill said, in terms of the qualifications listed for the consultant, that the firm team must have at least 5 years' experience in urban design, architecture, land use planning and/or economic development; given that they are adding to the future condition of the Downtown sustainability, should they consider climate action planning or sustainability-driven considerations in planning for the future?

Ms. Connors agreed, she will add the sustainability piece. She recommended that the consultants have that background, the State is looking to fund projects that mitigate climate change and the Complete Streets program is all about improving pedestrian and bike access, key if they want to attract grant funding. Ms. Connors anticipated working with a team of consultants; in her experience in Millbury's Downtown Revitalization, they had a team that consisted of two engineering firms, Mass Audubon, CMRPC, a watershed coalition. She felt it was unlikely that they would find one consultant with all of the skills, particularly with marketing and economic development, that is a different skill set than the design aspect, chances are that they will see consultants partner with each other on the response.

Mr. Leif thanked Ms. Connors for putting the RFP together and committee members for their input. He asked that she provide the committee with an update once the Town Administrator has reviewed it and it has been released. Ms. Connors will do so. She explained the advertising process and said the day it is advertised, she will send the RFP to Wesson and Sampson, the BL Companies, and VHB.

Update on Complete Streets Program

Ms. Connors said they have the contract in hand and the kick off meeting is scheduled for next Thursday.

Mr. Leif said, as the prioritization process goes forward, the committee wants to be sure that the way that the Master Plan viewed walkability and bikeability in particular areas of Town that were isolated by residents as high priority will work its way onto the list; he is aware there will be lots of competing interests as to what happens when.

Mr. Charpentier provided background on where they've gone with their consultant. This consultant developed their database for sidewalk inventory and conditions, they will be completing another evaluation of the sidewalks this Fall. In preparation of the kickoff meeting, they have their data, a copy of the Master Plan. The public outreach piece and schedule is the focus for the meeting.

Discussion of the Preliminary Boundary of Downtown

Ms. Connors shared a color-coded map of the Downtown. Streets in red indicated areas that all respondents were in agreement about, which included: Main, some of West Main Street, Monroe Street, Gale Road, parts of South, Blake, Hudson, and Pierce Streets. The second largest area of agreement is in orange: some of Whitney, Church, some of Howard, some of South, part of Summer. The next area is in yellow; further north on Hudson to the mill buildings, West Main to the intersection of Westbrook Road. In green, two votes; blue area, just one vote. They should

certainly include all of the red, also the orange might be places to include, outside of that, she was interested in their feedback.

Ms. Davies asked if the consultants would be able to look at some of those spots outside of the red. Ms. Connors said in Millbury, they had had different priorities for different areas of Downtown, so she thought it was possible; you could identify one area where you'd like to see physical improvements and another area where it is still your Downtown but where you have other goals and objectives, maybe that is where you do your zoning analysis and marketing.

Mr. Leif wanted to know the thought process from those who had made suggestions outside of the red and orange colored areas.

Mr. Dimare didn't see his suggestions on the map, such as the aqueduct, maybe that was too far away from the Downtown but he thought it was really important to include. He thought those items in red made sense for the Downtown. He thought places mentioned in the Master Plan—the aqueduct, Assabet River, White Cliffs, the park—that even though they aren't connected directly to the Downtown, they should be addressed in the Downtown, celebrated and supported and given access to, even if that just meant a nicer sidewalk to get to the Aqueduct, to not represent that area isn't right. There are a lot of different pieces of history in Town and he thought tying in the sidewalks, bike paths, and clear arrows pointing in the direction of historic and natural features would help celebrate the Downtown.

Ms. Davies agreed with those ideas of wayfinding and highlighting community assets. That was her thinking in how she'd expanded beyond the red.

Mr. Leif told Mr. Dimare that he would take responsibility for some of his things not being on the map. He knew they were important and there had to be connectivity from the Downtown to them but not necessarily in the Downtown, he suggested responding to what the Downtown is but not lose track of the fact that they need connectivity.

Mr. DiMare understood and said he didn't suggest extending the definition of the Downtown out to the aqueduct or the park, but he suggested markers in the Downtown pointing the way to those unique features.

Ms. Poretsky thought the red should extend past River Street to include Aluminum City, and the waterfall, maybe all the way to White Cliffs.

Mr. Leif asked if anyone present had recommended Winn Street/Winn Terrace/Park Street area and why. Ms. Poretsky didn't think it was part of Downtown but those residential streets feed into that Downtown, people can walk. Ms. Connors said Mr. Campbell had included those recommendations but she knew Norm Corbin had made a similar request. Ms. Davies said that Mr. Corbin was also hoping to have White Cliffs included if the plan moves forward in a way that makes sense for it to be included.

Mr. Leif said that several housing developments located inside the Summer Street boundary (the Housing Authority, Village Drive development, Center Drive on Hudson Street) are appropriate for inclusion into the Downtown.

Ms. Davies asked if the map as shown goes beyond what a normal downtown plan review. Ms. Connors said it was a lot, the larger the area of the scope of study, then the more spread out they are. The residential areas are built out with residential homes, other than looking at sidewalks what could they do there? The orange and yellow areas have more potential because there are some buildable areas there. Mr. Dimare agreed and said they don't have to look like the downtown, maybe the one common link they have is walkable accessibility to the downtown, they just try to tie it together.

Ms. Davies asked if they could decide on a central focus area, and keep these other places in play.

Ms. Cammarano agreed the aqueduct needs to be included, but something needs to change with regard to walkability and bikeability and how they get there and connect to the town. The Downtown is a vast area but condensed enough that they can do something wonderful with that.

Ms. Davies questioned whether the end of Summer Street is actually included, and a little up Whitney and Howard, she wasn't sure. Ms. Cammarano said there is a church, historic cemetery; some nice space to walk to. Ms. Davies might include that yellow piece to bring it up Hudson some more, but focusing on the red and orange makes sense.

Mr. Leif said that Mr. Corbin could bring some historic perspective. given the fact that they don't have to decide until the consultant is hired, does it make sense to continue this discussion to their next meeting, when they will have more participation from our committee?

Ms. Hirsch asked if it was still intended for this committee to walk the Downtown with the consultant. Ms. Connors said that was part of the scope. Mr. Leif clarified that the walk is a kickoff event with the staff, committee members who wish to participate, and the consultants they've hired. Ms. Connors said that in her experience, one of the key benefits of that walk is to identify problem areas and opportunities.

Mr. Kennedy asked how many members submitted a Downtown map. Ms. Connors said she'd received seven, which was about half of the committee. Mr. Kennedy suggested giving those members another opportunity to weigh in before the consultant is hired.

Ms. Cahill didn't submit her map, but said she'd highlighted three areas she considered key: Town-owned properties that could present them with opportunities; churches; and key areas along the Assabet where easements may be granted to access those beautiful properties. Mr. Leif agreed that if there was some way to provide walkability there, whether it is acquisitions of property or easements to property, it presented them with great potential. Mr. DiMare said where the mill is on Hudson Street, the confluence of the Assabet River and Cold Harbor Brook is capped with a concrete slab, but under that is a beautiful waterfall. Mr. Leif added that a beautiful view of Cold Harbor Brook can be viewed from going behind the fire station. Ms. Connors said that is another benefit of the site walk.

Ms. Davies wished to mention that she had recently taken a new job. As such, she wouldn't be able to dedicate as much of her time to her role as Chair and thought maybe she could switch roles with Mr. Leif. Mr. Leif thought it should be added as an agenda item for the following month. Ms. Poretsky thought they made a great team and worked well together.

Consideration of Minutes from March 17, 2022

Minor edits were made. Ms. Cammarano made a motion to accept the minutes as amended. Ms. Hirsch seconded. Roll call votes followed, all in favor.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:32pm.

Respectfully Submitted By
Michelle Cilley, Board Secretary