



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

June 9, 2022

Zoom Meeting Minutes

Approved Unanimously by Members on August 18, 2022

7:02pm - Introduction to Remote Meeting

Mr. Leif, as Vice-Chair, 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 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. 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 using the link listed on the posted agenda.

Members Present, remotely: Rick Leif, Vice-Chair; Amy Poretsky, Millie Milton, Fran Bakstran, Julianne Hirsch, Jeanne Cahill, Dario DiMare, John Campbell.

Others Present, remotely: Laurie Connors, Town Planner.

Update on RFP for Downtown Master Plan

Ms. Connors said she had completed the RFP after the last MPIC meeting and forwarded that to the Town Administrator for his comments but hadn't received his response yet. She hoped to advertise the RFP by the end of June with a turnaround time expected of three weeks. She anticipated a seven week timeframe from when it dropped on the street to the signing of the contract and scheduling of the kick-off meeting.

Discussion followed regarding the make-up of a subcommittee of five members which would meet twice; once to rank proposals and then to determine which candidates to interview and finally to interview those candidates. Ms. Connors expressed interest in participating as a voting member since she had done a similar project in Millbury and has that experience to share.

Ms. Bakstran said that while they were on the Master Plan Steering Committee, that committee didn't vote on selecting VHB, staff did. Ms. Connors said staff typically decides on the consultant to be hired. She noted that she would not be a voting member of the Master Plan Implementation Committee, just a voting member in the selection of the consultant since she has that past experience to share but that she would defer to the committee.

Mr. Leif said in this circumstance, based on what the MPIC was charged with doing, he thought the idea of having an odd number of members, and including the Town Planner in having a vote, made the most sense.

Ms. Bakstran made a motion to nominate the following individuals to be charged with the selection of the candidate for the Downtown Revitalization Project: Dario DiMare, Amy Poretsky, Rick Leif, Ashley Davies and Lori Connors. Ms. Hirsch seconded. Roll call vote was taken, all were in favor.

Update on RFP for Complete Streets

Mr. Leif asked Ms. Connors to provide an update on the meeting she'd attended on June 2.

Ms. Connors said she, Scott Charpentier and Fred Litchfield met with a consultant from Woodward and Curran to brainstorm a series of projects. Gaps in the sidewalk system and issues with problem intersections were identified. Ms. Connors said they were mindful to think of projects that would advance the Downtown Revitalization. Discussion included narrowing the list to 15 projects and having a public outreach session where people could vote on their top projects. Ms. Connors said that it was a productive meeting and a good starting point, but that they were not ready to go public yet. She noted that Complete Streets looks at the prioritization list in deciding to give funding.

Ms. Bakstran asked if it made sense to recommend those same projects at the community meeting next week for ARPA funding?

Ms. Connors said ARPA funding was a valuable resource for design but that Complete Streets paid more for construction. With the ARPA meeting just a week away, she was hesitant to go forward with that since they haven't done their visioning exercise to narrow down the top goals.

Ms. Cahill asked if Complete Streets is both rebuilding existing sidewalks or for the purpose of installing new bike lanes and sidewalks. Ms. Connors said yes and no; they don't like to replace existing sidewalks except in cases of a Downtown where a sidewalk is not ADA compliant, they will make an exception in that case but they prefer to fund projects that are dealing with gaps in the sidewalk network. They also like to fund projects that deal with Affordable Housing, so connections to housing authority projects, senior accommodations, low income housing, rank pretty high.

Continued Discussion on the Preliminary Boundary for Downtown

The committee had come to a consensus at the previous month's meeting on what they consider to be the core Downtown. He was interested in hearing from people who were not at the meeting.

Ms. Milton expressed an interest in having the aqueduct included in some way, to have attention drawn to it but not necessarily make it be within the boundaries of Downtown.

Mr. Campbell said in rereading the list in the Master Plan's implementation section, it drove him more to the ideas and less to the boundaries, he thought they might be getting off track by trying to define certain streets instead of what the Master Plan was driving them to. Land Use Goal 2 in the Master Plan is what defines the start of what they are talking about: 'enhance Downtown, enabling it to become the community's proud central gathering area'; that central gathering area is not places all over the map.

Ms. Bakstran agreed with Mr. Campbell, it's hard to not to include what lies outside of that but it is all residential, they aren't going to change Summer Street and School Street to being otherwise, they might encourage some in-home occupations that may be of interest for people to walk to. She thought that gathering spot would be in the area of Downtown that was color coded in red, everything should be enhanced and improved as much as they can, or maintain the historic nature of homes along Summer and School Streets. The Downtown should be made to be inviting as a place for people to drive to, park, and visit various places.

Ms. Hirsch said there were a lot of comments about capitalizing on the river, are we saying tonight that is another phase in the Master Plan or do we want the consultant to highly consider that? Mr. Leif said that from his perspective, it's something they should encourage the consultant to look into.

Mr. DiMare felt that the consultants should be aware of the goals in the Master Plan but that their focus is on the Downtown.

Mr. Leif asked if Ms. Connors thought the map was acceptable as it is? Ms. Connors said in looking at the map, it's clear that the river is an important piece of the Downtown. The downtown in her mind is kind of the civic and commercial core, the aqueduct is an open space resource and important to include in wayfinding but not in the category of being within the core. They need to focus on pedestrian scale lighting, concrete sidewalks, dense mixed residential and commercial use.

Mr. Campbell noted that at the last Town meeting, residents had approved hiring a separate consultant for the aqueduct. That project is being pursued and doesn't need to be the focus for the Downtown consultant.

Mr. Leif said that over time, as they improve the Downtown, they should continue to improve walkability from the Town center to the aqueduct, Ellsworth-McAfee Park, White Cliffs; the ability to move out from the center to these resources, that all fits into the bigger view of the Master Plan.

Discussion followed over the boundaries as drawn on the map. Mr. Leif said this map is nothing more than a representation of what committee members voted for, it doesn't mean that we can't describe this differently. He asked Ms. Connors for her opinion.

Ms. Connors suggested that she could create an additional map with just three colors; red to indicate the primary study area, orange to indicate the secondary study area, and yellow to include those areas that should be walkable to the Downtown.

Reorganization of Committee

Ms. Davies said at the last meeting that, based on her job, she didn't have the bandwidth to consider being the Chair, but would like to be Vice-Chair, and she and Mr. Leif would switch roles and continue to work with Ms. Connors.

Ms. Hirsch made a motion to make Mr. Leif Chair of the MPIC. Ms. Poretsky seconded. Roll call vote was taken, all were in favor.

Mr. DiMare made a motion to make Ms. Davies Vice Chair of the MPIC. Ms. Poretsky seconded. Roll call vote was taken, all were in favor.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:42pm.

Respectfully Submitted By
Michelle Cilley, Board Secretary