



# TOWN OF NORTHBOROUGH PLANNING BOARD

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Approved 06.09.20

**Planning Board**  
**Town Hall, Selectmen's Meeting Room**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**March 5, 2020**

**Members in Attendance:** Kerri Martinek, Chair; Amy Poretsky, Vice Chair; Michelle Gillespie; Anthony Ziton; Mille Milton

**Members Absent:** None

**Others Present:** Kathy Joubert, Town Planner; (audience attendees - see attached sign in sheet)

Chair Martinek called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m.

Continued discussion RE: Adoption of Master Plan – The final component to discuss was Housing. Feedback was also received at the last meeting regarding inclusionary zoning from the ZBA Chair, Brad Blanchette. Mr. Blanchette stated that he is in attendance tonight as a resident, not as a member of the Zoning Board. His job is to enforce the bylaws however they are written, in the best interest of the town, and not bring his personal opinion into the matter. He said Master Plan Steering Committee Co-Chair Fran Bakstran has done a great job of representing the ZBA on the Master Plan Committee and providing updates to the board.

After reviewing the survey results and comparing them to the goals, he noticed that throughout the survey results housing was not necessarily deemed a high priority. However, in the Master Plan there were 11 housing goals; 7 were deemed high priority. What was important to people was traffic, schools, etc. Inadequate housing inventory had less than a 5% priority; affordability less than 22%. Regarding traffic and the vibrancy of downtown, traffic was 42%; vibrancy of downtown was 77%; lack of mixed use was 12%; in his opinion the survey results did not match what the high priority goals are. Inclusionary housing and missing middles were called out. The Master Plan should be an overarching guide for where the town is going for twenty years. In looking back at the last twenty years, he thinks they have done a great job as a town with housing and commended Mr. Leif on his leadership on the Planning Board at that time. The biggest increase in the last twenty years of housing inventory in Northborough are apartments, condos, and townhouses. He said we are doing a great job, will continue to do a great job and doesn't think housing should be a high priority of the Master Plan. The schools need improvements, the Fire Department is looking for a new station, and the town hall building is not in good condition. He thinks we need to de-prioritize the housing and prioritize other things based on the survey results and what we are seeing around town.

Inclusionary housing was extensively discussed. Ms. Gillespie thinks inclusionary is one of many tools the Boards should have in their toolbox. We have to step back and look at what is happening now; which is that land is so expensive. There is also an issue with density. She said builders prefer duplexes; the land is expensive but they get 2 for 1. If you are looking 20 years out, you

are taking the land that is left, what people want to do with density, and are putting more houses on it than it was actually built for. We must ask for something in return. Developers need to build it and deed restrict it, give something back to the community in return, or give an affordable; you have a tool in the toolbox. Right now, the Planning Board or the ZBA have nothing in the toolbox to use when somebody asks for something very dense.

Ms. Martinek asked how you keep it from being lifted years later. Ms. Gillespie said it would be an enforcement issue. Ms. Joubert said that with affordables, typically the town's experience has been with the comprehensive permits. She explained that affordable units are deed restricted; there is an affordable housing rider that goes with the unit. There is a formula that the state works with as far as what price the unit can be sold for or rented for, and there is a process with the state as far as income eligibility and allowed assets. For any resale of the units, the owner has to come to the town, the town has to approve whether the unit can be resold, it then goes to the state, the state determines what the sale price is; the town and the state hold a housing lottery if it is a 40B. Ms. Martinek asked if it is an inclusionary, how do we know the deed is not just changed. Ms. Joubert said in the past the town did have an inclusionary bylaw in place. The density bonus was not high enough for it ever to be used. At some point in the 90s the board made the determination that it was not being used; went to town meeting and voted to remove the bylaw. There are many facets to an inclusionary zoning bylaw; a deed restriction is one of them.

Ms. Martinek asked Mr. Blanchette about the article he referenced and said it points to not really producing what people had hoped it to produce and be affordable housing. He thinks they put the cart before the horse assuming we know what we are talking about with inclusionary zoning when half the town and cities failed at it. In other research he said, for example, when you ask a developer to charge \$250K for one unit when it should sell for \$400K, where's the \$150K going to get recouped; the developer is not going to take the hit. The other three units will be priced at a higher rate to recoup the loss which means you are reducing the amount of affordable housing; we are talking about high density vs. revenue. According to the assessor's data, single-family homes still collect the largest amount of tax revenue. Let's look at inclusionary housing, but de-prioritize it.

Mr. Ziton asked Mr. Blanchette if his concern was about the high-density bonuses that people would take advantage of; Mr. Blanchette said not necessarily the bonuses, it's early inclusionary vs. what the survey results show; if it is not considered high priority, but the takeaways were considered high priority. It has reduced the affordable housing supply in towns that already have it in place; it is not working. Ms. Gillespie said that the town is at a point where density is critical because the land is so expensive. How do you address the density? How do you deal with the mixed-use density? Density affects the town services and schools. Developers want the density; it's the next generation of housing, and to not address it means you are leaving the town open and vulnerable with no tools.

Ms. Joubert said whether it is inclusionary zoning or other tools this board or future boards want to address, it can be done as overlay districts, specific districts; you can stay out of certain housing districts, there are ways to address some of the questions brought up tonight. If density is what you are going to go after, it's a matter of where you place that density. Ms. Gillespie felt density affects towns in general unless something is in place. It leaves the town vulnerable unless you can get something back from the density for town services or for schools. Mr. Leif said this was all discussed during the Committee meetings for housing and it was clear what needed to be done

or evaluated and discussed. He said intentionally the wording for inclusionary zoning was explored, not implemented, not recommended; basically understand what it is, how it is working, how it is not working, and eventually if it made sense that we want to eventually do something about it, it would have to come before the Planning Board. The idea was part of the overall discussion of housing needs in town to explore inclusionary zoning. He said the reason H2-1 was put into the plan was to help determine the direction where the town has to go with housing. They included H2-6 (Housing Production Plan) because it is a very specific approach to affordable housing to give you a direction towards how to get more units on the inventory. Reviewing the Housing Production Plan was a way to go back and review what was done in the past about putting more state approved affordable housing on the inventory. H2-1 was a broader approach to look at the housing needs in general and come up with some ideas of what can be done and along the way said it would make sense to go back and at least explore what inclusionary zoning was all about. It was set as a high priority because he felt there was a lot of feedback from the residents. Mr. Blanchette said he understands the senior housing issue and, looking at the goals, sees little to no talk about senior housing. He thinks the bylaws that they're talking about opens up the schools to get crushed again, and more traffic on downtown. He said seniors want to stay in their homes and mentioned Marlborough's senior tax write off program. Ms. Joubert explained Northborough also has that program for seniors.

Ms. Poretsky had questions about the housing study. She felt there should be a Housing Plan, but not a Housing Production Plan if we are tied to a 40B. Ms. Joubert said we have done both in this town. We have a Housing Plan and a Housing Production Plan. The Housing Production Plan has very specific requirements from the state. There are certain elements that any community has to adhere to; it is approved by the state. There are two parts of the Housing Production Plan, the demographics (infrastructure; how to support it), and how the units are going to be built. It makes sense within 2-3 years to do the overall general housing plan because we will have the 2020 census. Ms. Poretsky said there should be a high-density exploration before implementation. Mr. Blanchette said based on the survey, schools are a top priority, the inclusionary missing middle will make more of an issue because of the way the recommendations are written; it doesn't touch on 55+. He thinks we are opening the town up to an influx of families to the schools. The Master Plan says that Peaslee and Melican schools need work.

Ms. Poretsky said the definition of missing middle talks about "such as cottage housing" and that we could consider the merits of cottage housing, that way it is not open up to the entire missing middle. Her concern is that it is meant for urban areas and would like to reword it to make it more specific. Mr. Ziton thinks missing middle is a broad-based term and thought it would make more sense to target something more specific or scale that was meant for the downtown area rather than leaving the broad-based term as part of the Master Plan. Ms. Martinek asked how do we provide opportunities for people to afford to live here but not make it for people who live here to suffer. Ms. Joubert explained the missing middle references cottage cluster housing as one example; it is in the definition of missing middle. Anything related to housing, none of it is going to happen unless there are zoning tools to allow it to happen. She reiterated to the board that because Goal #1 is listed as Goal #1, does not mean that it is the first goal. One of the reasons inclusionary housing is in the Master Plan is because there are not many zoning tools on how to explore how to do density and get the tradeoff for affordable units; that is what inclusionary zoning is all about; it is one of the few tools in Massachusetts that is a zoning tool. Language will read "explore the merits of zoning bylaws which would require a portion of the housing units be set aside for low- and moderate-income households". (Goal 1) Ms. Poretsky said ensuring that Avalon and other Chapter 40B developments remain in compliance with their regulatory

agreements was mentioned in other Master Plans. Ms. Joubert told her they are assigned a regulatory agency; a report has to be submitted to her every year which also goes to DHCD and to their monitoring agent.

Ms. Martinek was trying to understand the Municipal Affordable Housing Trust Funds and was it something the board should establish. Ms. Joubert said the town does not have a Housing Trust Fund. Not all towns that have inclusionary zoning have a Housing Trust. Years ago, Northborough did approve legislation at town meeting to have a housing trust. It became evident afterwards that there was not a lot of support to enact it, so nothing transpired. Governor Romney later passed legislation that established the language everyone had to use. The town did not adopt it because there was already language. Ms. Joubert said if they were to do an inclusionary bylaw or something in lieu of building units, which is not the way to go, they would either look at a Housing Trust or other mechanism such as the existing Northborough Affordable Housing Corporation. The NAHC applies for CPA funding and a funding agreement is signed with the Board of Selectmen for the use of the funds.

(Goal 2) Ms. Martinek added a line about the housing price point study being considered more as part of the bigger comments of the Housing Production Plan; she did not understand why they were setting up a price point. Mr. Leif explained that the study was to try to figure out what a reasonable priced house would be for the average Northborough homeowner to keep them at 30% or less of their income for housing costs, and is even a bigger issue for seniors who have a fixed income. He said before you want to figure out what kind of house you want to build, you need to figure out the cost and how to go about doing that. Price points were a way to describe some targets in a strategy discussion about housing in town. Ms. Martinek said we need a starting point and an assessment. Ms. Joubert suggested removing “production” from the sentence “to be considered part of a more comprehensive Housing Production Plan”.

Ms. Martinek discussed adding separate groups, e.g., seniors, people with disabilities; the seniors are 25% of the population, their needs are unique, they are on fixed incomes. She commented there was no representative from the Council on Aging at the Committee meetings. Mr. Leif said the Chair of the Master Plan Steering Committee, Fran Bakstran (who serves at BayPath Elder Care Services) is probably the most familiar with elderly concerns of anybody in this town. He said it was mentioned several times that that there was no representation on the Committee and would argue that is not true. Several of the MP Committee members are seniors in the community. The language to be added to H2-2 will be “work with senior groups and senior representatives, including Council on Aging, to understand and explore housing options that could best accommodate their unique housing needs”.

Ms. Martinek has been talking with parents who have children with disabilities and talked to the president of Pathways to Housing for Adults with Autism. In 15-20 years, they will be part of the housing market; what do we have set up for them? She thinks there should be a committee to discuss the housing needs for people with disabilities; possibly create Section H2-7 to discuss people with disabilities. Ms. Milton said it would have to be specific. Mr. Zitton said it could be left to explore. Ms. Joubert said specific language would be needed; she will contact the consultants. Ms. Martinek suggested that this topic is possibly something we can address in an update of the MP but wanted to at least initiate a discussion about it this evening.

Trying to finalize H2-3, they talked about cottage housing and Mr. Zitton’s concerns. Ms. Joubert again said cottage housing is in the missing middle definition. Missing middle is not specific to

housing ownership; it means a certain segment of the population; how it is addressed varies. Ms. Milton asked if the units that are rented by seniors, etc., counted as housing units. Ms. Gillespie asked if assisted living units were built and were rented, is it a housing unit or a building. Mr. Leif said the view of the Master Plan Committee was to include as many optional types of housing as possible. He said the wording could be changed or delete. H2-3 language was changed to read “explore the creation of certain types of housing that is inherently more affordable to seniors aging in place, first time homebuyers, and working professionals”. After further discussion about the terminology to be used, the members decided that H2-3 will be deleted.

**H2-5:** Ms. Gillespie asked if the wording could be changed to “guided by zoning and ‘meets’ design standards incorporating housing into downtown to attract residents” (remove the rest) “while maintaining the existing character in downtown neighborhoods”. She asked how do you measure what is considered sufficient to support the economic viability of the downtown; you have to meet design standards. Ms. Joubert said you can only have design regulations that must be adhered to in historic districts. Ms. Poretsky suggested adding “after receiving the results of the downtown visualization study” since we are doing a downtown visualization study and it will lay out what we want. Mr. Leif said the goals are not ordered in any particular order; they are statements of things to be done. Ms. Joubert said if you want a vibrant downtown, it’s economics, there has to be a mixed use; there has to be a mass to support those downtown businesses. What the mass and density is, is different for every town; that’s part of the market analysis they should be doing as part of the whole downtown. Ms. Gillespie said she didn’t understand what a sufficient number of residents that can supplement and support the area’s economic viability means. Mr. Leif said the statement is trying to reinforce the point that the part that housing plays in the viability of downtown is that there has to be enough of it to make sense to generate traffic you need for residents. It isn’t saying how much housing there needs to be; it’s trying to connect the fact that there needs to be, based on our zoning design standards, some housing created in the downtown area. That’s why the word “sufficient” was used. Ms. Poretsky suggested adding “guided by zoning design standards and the downtown visualization study” because she thought the study would help what housing is going to look like downtown. Language will be inserted as the third bullet under Design Standards. The Master Plan Committee was fine with adding “while maintaining the existing character in downtown neighborhoods”.

**H2-6:** Language will read “update the town’s existing Housing Production Plan to include present day information, including a robust impact analysis study”. A placeholder for creating a committee to research the housing needs for people with disabilities will be added. Ms. Joubert will contact the consultants for the language.

Regarding the Selectmen setting up the Master Plan Implementation Committee, Ms. Martinek discussed having two members from the Planning Board to be aligned with their planning Board terms.

Ms. Joubert will forward the changes to the consultants and to the board.

Ms. Milton made a motion to approve the Master Plan as amended; Ms. Poretsky seconded; all voted in favor; motion approved.

**Old/New Business:**

Consideration of Minutes – Ms. Gillespie made a motion to approve the Meeting Minutes of December 12, 2019 as amended; Mr. Ziton seconded; all voted in favor; motion approved.

Mr. Ziton made a motion to approve the Meeting Minutes of January 21, 2020 as amended; Ms. Milton seconded; all voted in favor; motion approved.

ANR Plans – There was one plan for approval tonight.

Ms. Gillespie made a motion to adjourn; Ms. Milton seconded; all voted in favor; motion approved. The meeting was adjourned at 9:38 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Melanie Rich  
Board Secretary