



TOWN OF NORTHBOROUGH Master Plan Steering Committee

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Master Plan Steering Committee Meeting Minutes March 7, 2019 Northborough Free Library

Members Present: Fran Bakstran, Chairman; Rick Leif, Vice-Chairman; Michelle Gillespie, Dave Putnam, Tom Reardon, Susan Lawrence, Ashley Davies, Mark Donahue, Amy Poretsky, John Cogswell, Jason Perreault, George Pember

Others Present: Kathy Joubert, Town Planner; Geoffrey Morrison-Logan, VHB; Renee Guo, VHB; Kerri Martinek, 16 Hemlock Drive; Anthony Ziton, 17 Franklin Circle; Henry P. Squillante, 72 Crestwood Drive; Gibb Chase, 6 Kimball Lane

Chairman Bakstran opened the meeting at 7:00pm.

Ms. Bakstran noted member Norm Corbin was not able to attend this meeting but submitted a letter to the members, dated March 4, 2019, with his Master Plan input. Please note his letter is attached to these minutes.

Mr. Morrison-Logan and Ms. Guo reviewed the Third Public Forum that was held on February 13th, stating they reviewed and discussed the draft Goals and Recommendations; approximately 30 people were in attendance; and the format was Open House with seven stations, one for each Master Plan element. There were conversations, Post-it Notes and flip-chart comments; and a dot voting exercise for recommendation prioritization.

The members present, Mr. Morrison-Logan and Ms. Guo, reviewed the top ten prioritized Goals & Recommendations, as follows:

Goals

- Land Use 2: Enhanced Downtown – 16 votes in total
- Economic 1: Define Downtown – 13 votes
- Open Space & Recreation 1: Maintain and expand active recreation – 10 votes
- Natural, Cultural and Historic Resources - Repurpose surplus Town-owned buildings – 8 votes
- Housing 1 – Continue to maintain and encourage diversity – 7 votes
- Public Facilities and Services 4: Continue to support an excellent educational system – 6 votes
- Transportation 2: Improve Town-wide traffic flow and safety - 5 votes
- Economic Development 4: - Position the Town to attract more visitors – 4 votes
- Transportation 1: Become a bicycle and pedestrian-friendly community by expanding - existing bicycle and pedestrian facilities and roadways – 4 votes

Recommendations

- Housing 2: Ensure the Town's Zoning Bylaw supports the creation of more affordable housing types – 4 votes

It was noted that the committee will continue to review and tweak these Goals & Recommendations.

Widely Identified Changes to Goals & Recommendations

- Remove "Right-to Farm" from land use recommendations
- Re-add the creation of turf fields to applicable recreation recommendations

Additional Goal & Recommendation Considerations

- Prevent habitat fragmentation and preserve wildlife corridors(s)
- Create walking path/route within the historic Downtown
- Establish buffer zones between commercial, industrial and residential uses
- Enhance cohesive appearance of commercial areas through signage regulation(s)
- Utilize existing building and open spaces for innovative events such as arts and crafts
- Expand waste and recycle management to include composting

Continued Discussion RE: Recommendations - Housing

Housing 1: Continue to maintain and encourage a diversity of housing options to increase housing affordability and choice for all ages and to ensure that at least 10 percent of the Town's housing inventory continues to be deemed affordable under state guidelines.

- Explore residential uses, including affordable housing and affordable senior housing as a potential future use for previously developed parcels that have the opportunity for redevelopment as they become available;
- Evaluate the White Cliffs site; the Westborough State Hospital property in Northborough; and the Boundary Street property as potential sites for housing development;
- Develop and adopt an inclusionary housing bylaw that would require a portion of the housing units in specified developments to be set aside for low and moderate-income households; and
- Work with local housing partners to identify opportunities for them to develop and own affordable housing, which will allow the Town to proactively guide affordable housing locations.

Housing 2: Ensure that the Town's Zoning Bylaw supports the creation of certain types of ownership or rental housing developments that are inherently more affordable to seniors aging in place, first time homebuyers, and working professional.

- Undertake a study to understand housing price points for homeownership and rentals that would reduce the cost burden experienced by Town residents. Determine the types of housing that would meet these price-points. Work collaboratively with developers to enable these housing type in targeted areas;
- Identify appropriate areas for “missing middle” housing to preserve and provide transitions from existing residential neighborhoods to the Downtown and update zoning to accommodate such housing;
- Build awareness around accessory housing units, allowed by right or by special permits in the Town’s residential districts;
- Guided by zoning and design standards, incorporate housing into Downtown to attract a sufficient number of residents that can supplement and support the area’s economic viability;
- Determine the need for rental housing and approve such developments; and
- Update the Town’s existing Housing Production Plan.

Housing 3: Pursue a housing development strategy that balances demands with the Town’s capacity to provide services and infrastructure.

- In coordination with the Public Facilities and Services, identify the Town’s capacity to service housing demands with expanded infrastructure. Refer to the Cost of Community Services Study referenced in Land Use 1-1; and
- Revive the Housing Partnership to support established housing policies, monitor Northborough’s housing needs, recommend actions to meet housing needs, and evaluate funding sources available to create housing.

Project Status and Next Steps

The members discussed the projects status and the next steps, as follows:

Project Next Steps

- Launch a third and final public survey to review and prioritize recommendations and include a brief/preliminary Visual Preference Survey;
- Finalize Recommendations based on public comments received from survey;
- Develop the Implementation Plan based on finalized recommendations; and
- Compile full draft of Master Plan Report for the Steering Committee’s review.

Next/Final Public Survey

- The primary goal is to allow the public additional opportunity to review and comment on the draft Recommendations;
- Consider using a similar ranking system to the Public Forum for prioritization purposes; and
- At the end, include a brief/preliminary Visual Preference Survey.

Visual Preference Survey/What is a Visual Preference Survey?

- A visual technique that allows the public and decision-makers to determine preferences for various types of community design, architectural styles, land/street-scaping, and/or built-environmental options; and
- Through a Visual Preference Survey, stakeholders can determine which components of a plan or project environment contribute positively to a community's overall character or features.

What do we want to achieve?

- Downtown design?
- Housing style?
- Signage and/or streetscape?
- Other?

Visual Preference Survey – Examples

- How strongly do you prefer to see similar types of mixed-use development in the Downtown – *Very strongly, Somewhat, Neutral, Maybe not, Not at all*
- Is the building form and placement appropriate for Downtown? – *Yes, No, Not sure*

Ask a question about a future Downtown Action

In developing a master plan for the Downtown, which of the following will be important to develop:

- Define a clear boundary for downtown
- Create updates to zoning
- Establish design guidelines
- Prepare parking strategies
- Identify Public-Private Opportunities for development
- Create a vision for the Old Fire Station
- Illustrate opportunity to improve streetscape and place-making
- Identify programming and events
- All of the above
- Not sure

A document entitled Town of Northborough Master Plan – Goals and Draft Recommendations, that was for presentation of the February 13th Public Forum, was reviewed.

Ms. Bakstran explained her section was about Transportation, stating Route 20 in the Downtown was the main issue, because of cars, bikes and pedestrians, and signs to make the area was suggested. She noted the conversations were overall very positive. Ms. Poretsky noted that signs for biking may not be helpful.

Mr. Leif explained his section was Housing, and there was a lot of feedback surrounding residents who are older and have problems with housing. Mr. Putman agreed, stating it is critical.

Mr. Pember explained his section was Economic Development, and the conversation focused on mainly what to do about Route 20 and also looking at doing something with town land.

Ms. Lawrence explained her section was Public Facilities and Services and she noted residents were interested in what could happen with the Fire Stations in town.

Mr. Putnam explained his section was Open Space & Recreation, stating residents were interested about turf fields and some ideas they want to try. He stated some would rather have an athletic complex rather than a turf field; and added the Northborough field is not good. Ms. Joubert stated they would not be able to use outside funds, however the Open Space and Recreation Plan will be updated, hopefully in the spring, and this will be discussed. Ms. Bakstran noted new committees will probably be formed from this. Mr. Perreault suggested the possibility of hosts to help with the cost. Mr. Putman also gave a history of dog parks in Northborough.

Mr. Morrison-Logan talked about Cluster Zones – smaller lots and smaller homes; Route 20 and the Downtown; Signage Regulations – getting the right signs; Building and Open Space, and Expansion of Solid Waste with Composting.

Mr. Reardon talked about the Right to Farm and Ms. Joubert explained the Planning Board had recently looked into the process to become a Right to Farm Community. But at the time, there were no issues so it didn't go any further; and she suggested it would be best not to pursue it right now given the current legal action of the Town with two of the farms. Ms. Bakstran stated the climate might not be right, and Ms. Gillespie noted it is more of an issue in smaller neighborhoods.

Ms. Davies suggested exploring options for composters.

Mr. Cogswell talked about the utilization of existing buildings and open spaces, including using parts of the Town Hall.

Mr. Morrison-Logan stated he will be tweaking the plan, and noted signage and housing were the major issues. Ms. Guo stated she will have a summary of the comments from the forum for the next meeting.

Mr. Morrison-Logan also stated they will add the glossary to the website.

Comments from members regarding what could be changed, removed, added or kept the same to the process of the forum were: making the survey easy to use so people will reply; have conversations about things that most people did not check; force people to make a decision as to whether they agree or disagree with something; use the boxes on the sheets to get better information; and using the dots worked well.

Survey Distribution

It was noted that the survey will be ready in 2-3 weeks and will be available on the website for 6-8 weeks. In addition, it will be distributed to the Town News, the Senior Newsletter, the Town's website, the Master Plan website, the Lion's Club sign, the DPW's sign, the Recreation Department's email list, and Social Media.

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Steering Committee will be held in the Large Meeting Room of the Northborough Free Public Library on May 9th at 7pm.

The meeting adjourned at 9:15pm.

Respectfully Submitted by,

Debbie Grampietro
Planning Department
Administrative Assistant