



Town of Pepperell

Master Plan Advisory Committee

1 Main Street, Pepperell, Massachusetts 01463-1644

Meeting Minutes-January 9, 2020

Committee Members Present:

Renee D'Argento
Diane Cronin
Nancy Lebedzinski
Paul J. Lonergan
Joyce Morrow
Kathryn Pries
Robert Rand
Sherrill Rosoff
Stephen Themelis
Jack Visniewski
Chuck Walkovich

Committee Members Absent:

Deborah Fountain
Ken Hartlage
Kenneth Morgan
Amanda Nichols
David Sears
Stephen Witmer

Others Present:

Jay Donovan, NMCOG
Beverly Woods, NMCOG
Paula Terrasi, Conservation Agent

1. Minutes of the December 12, 2019 meeting

Chuck Walkovich stated that he has not received many responses from committee members identifying their top three priorities for each chapter. A reminder will be sent out to the Committee so that the requested input can be utilized in the implementation chapter.

A motion to accept the December 12, 2019 minutes was made by Steve Themelis and seconded Joyce Morrow. Sherrill Rosoff requested a correction noting that she was referring to the five-year implementation status report for the previous Master Plan and not the Koff, report as indicated in paragraph 4. The Master Plan Committee unanimously approved the minutes as amended.

2. Action Item Status Review

Chuck Walkovich stated that he is working to set up a meeting with the Town Administrator to address the removal of inactive Committee members who have not submitted their written resignations. Kathryn Pries noted that the meeting minutes have been listing Carol Quinn as absent although she submitted a written resignation letter months ago.

3. Discussion and Review of the Revised Economic Development Chapter

Jay Donovan distributed a copy of the state's Economic Development Plan to the Committee members for their information. He then reviewed the new edits to the economic development chapter. References to "streamlined permitting" were removed and replaced with the words "an efficient and transparent permitting process". Several other revisions to the recommendations section were reviewed. The revisions were based on committee comments from the previous meeting.

On page 8, language was added on the importance of MCAS scores. Jay clarified that Table 6 on page 10 is referring to Pepperell residents, no matter where they work. He noted that 16% of Pepperell residents work in town, and that there has been a shift from the goods producing domain to the service providing domain. Nancy Lebedzinski stated that the title of the table is confusing.

Information on telecommuting was added that speaks to the increase in telecommuting in recent years. Sherrill Rosoff asked whether there is data that addresses the impact of telecommuting on the need for services. Jay Donovan stated that he has not seen such information. Sherrill Rosoff noted that there may be a need for better telecommunication infrastructure and services to accommodate those working from their homes.

Joyce Morrow added that there may be a demand for shared business space, and that some workers use the strong internet connection available at the library, as well as other library equipment such as the fax machine and photocopier. Sherrill Rosoff stated that there may be an opportunity to create business incubator space in Pepperell, perhaps at the Peter Fitzpatrick School. Diane Cronin noted that the lack of good cell service is problematic, as well as poor internet upload speeds. Beverly Woods informed the Committee that telecommunication services will be addressed in the Facilities and Services chapter.

Jay Donovan explained the categories within the location quotients table and outlined the limitations of the data. In discussing the information on page 17, he noted that there is a relatively high concentration of construction firms in Pepperell that pay high wages. He added that economic development professionals focus on industry clusters as a means of building off the existing economic strengths within a community.

In discussing the wage data, Jay noted that the data is consistent with the location quotient

data that showed the construction industry having higher wages. This data demonstrates the need to set a proactive policy for attracting and recruiting construction related companies that pay higher wages.

Language was added to the recommendations sections stating that the EDAC should review past plans and reports to determine whether any of the past strategies were ever implemented. The EDAC should also develop an economic development strategy based on that review for presentation to the Board of Selectmen.

As requested information was added to page 36 on the benefits of TIF agreements. Diane Cronin asked if there are communities that have TIF revenue on infrastructure improvements in the area of the business that received the TIF agreement. Beverly Woods responded that she believe that approach would most likely occur through a DIF (District Improvement Financing). TIF offers tax breaks to developers, while DIF channels tax dollars into targeted redevelopment districts. Using DIF, municipalities can pledge all or a portion of tax increments to fund district improvements over time. With TIF, municipalities may grant property tax exemptions of up to 100% of the tax increment for a fixed period.

On page 48, language was added regarding food hubs, as well as a recommendation for increased cooperation between the agricultural community and the Agricultural Advisory Board. Discussion was added on the need to build on the natural assets of the town in order to promote ecotourism. Discussion on regional economic development initiatives, including the Indian Hill Music Center, was also added.

4. Climate Change and Sustainability Work Group

There was no update at this time.

6. Draft Facilities and Services Technical Paper

Beverly Woods reviewed the content of the Facilities and Services Technical Paper. The document describes the town's governmental structure, finances, and municipal properties. She noted that Pepperell does not employ a facilities manager, although such a position would be of value. She indicated that an assessment of all municipal buildings is needed, as was recently discussed with the town administrator. An assessment of roof conditions at town hall has been performed. The town has plans to renovate the town hall building and to replace the emergency management garage. The library roof is in need of repair, and the police station has several building issues that need to be addressed. The town also has plans to renovate fire stations 2 and 3.

The Peter Fitzpatrick School building was discussed based on recent building assessments undertaken by the Feasibility Committee. Sherrill Rosoff asked about the condition of the DPW building. Beverly Woods responded that information on the condition of that particular structure, as well as the Water Division building, was not readily available but could be incorporated if the information can be provided. She added that she will contact Ken Kalinowski to determine whether such information exists.

The condition of the Senior Center and Community Center were discussed. Nancy Lebedzinski stated that the work outlined for the Senior Center in the technical paper was completed recently, and that the upstairs lighting at the Community Center has been addressed. It was suggested that Nancy Archer be contacted.

Beverly Woods asked whether the town has adequate cemetery capacity to meet future demand. Paula Terrasi offered to reach out to the person managing the cemeteries. Renee D'Argento asked about the condition of the Lock-up building. The condition of the building was not known to Committee members.

Governmental structure in Pepperell was discussed. Beverly Woods asked whether the Capital Planning Committee, which is described in the town's charter, is active in Pepperell. The Master Plan Committee members stated that the Capital Planning Committee no longer exists, and that the FinCom and Town Administrator develop the capital plan. Beverly Woods suggested that the committee be deleted from the town charter through the update currently being undertaken.

The public safety departments were discussed. Beverly Woods noted that Pepperell still relies heavily on volunteer firefighters. In Pepperell, emergency dispatch is handled by the Communications Department, which is unusual for communities in the Commonwealth. Beverly Woods pointed out that the Animal Control officer in Pepperell only addresses dog issues, according to the town's website. Paula Terrasi stated that Pepperell actually has a dog officer and an animal control officer, and that she will gather more information on the responsibilities of each person.

The characteristics of the town's water, sewer, and stormwater infrastructure were discussed, including planned improvements to the systems. Energy services and initiatives were summarized and discussed, including electric aggregation and conversion of streetlights to LEDs. Sherrill Rosoff asked whether there have been conversations about National Grid's distribution loads as they relate to solar installation. Beverly Woods has discussed the issue with National Grid, and that they indicated customers are responsible for funding any grid improvements needed to accommodate a solar project, regardless of whether it is a commercial or residential installation.

Solid waste management was discussed. Sherrill Rosoff noted that the Town recently banned single-use plastic bags; the regulation is under review by the Attorney General's office.

7. Open Forum

Diane Cronin asked for a description of the Implementation Chapter and added that the Master Plan document should be searchable and user-friendly. Chuck Walkovich noted that he has been encouraging the committee members to identify the three master plan themes that have been discussed on an ongoing basis. Committee members need to send him recommendations on what they believe to be the priority recommendations in the

plan. He added that less than half of the Committee has responded to his previous request, and that the priorities should be identified in the Implementation Chapter.

Beverly Woods recommended that the Town form a Master Plan Implementation Committee to track progress and report annually to Town Meeting. Beverly Woods added that the Implementation Chapter will contain a very brief narrative, along with a table that lists each recommendation, identifies the entity responsible for implementation, and outlines an implementation timeframe. She added that a Word document and PDF will be transmitted to the town, so that the IT director can create a searchable document on the town's website.

Steve Themelis asked how much longer it will take to complete the process. Beverly Woods responded that the draft document should be available by April.

Joyce Morrow stated that the Town needs to focus on economic development and housing in order to generate additional revenue. She added that zoning bylaw revisions are key to growing the tax base and providing needed services. Rob Rand responded that the Town needs to look at the fiscal impact of additional development, to ensure that the project does not cost the town more money than it generates. Chuck Walkovich added that there needs to be a balance between growing the tax base and the desire for additional services. Rob Rand suggested that the State reexamine the way in which education is funded.

The meeting adjourned at 8:37 pm.