



Town of Pepperell

Master Plan Advisory Committee

1 Main Street, Pepperell, Massachusetts 01463-1644

Meeting Minutes-January 10, 2019

Committee Members Present:

Diane Cronin
Renee D'Argento
Tracie Ezzio
Deborah Fountain
Ken Hartlage
Nancy Lebedzinski
Paul J. Lonergan
Joyce Morrow
Kathryn Pries
Robert Rand
Sherrill Rosoff
Stephen Themelis
Chuck Walkovich
Stephen Witmer
Jack Visniewski

Committee Members Absent:

Kenneth Morgan
Amanda Nichols
Carol Quinn
David Sears
Mark Vasapolli

Others Present:

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

1. Open Forum

Joyce Morrow asked how the proposed Zoning Reform legislation could impact the Master Plan. Beverly Woods responded that there have been efforts to revise the State's zoning law for over two decades. Past legislative attempts have been unsuccessful, in large part due to opposition from realtors, homebuilders and developers. Over the last few years, there was also opposition from the Massachusetts Municipal Association (MMA) relative to some proposed new

requirements for municipalities in the legislation, such as a requirement that the Master Plan and Zoning Bylaw be consistent with one another. Beverly Woods added that she has not seen the version that will be filed this legislative session, as the legislators are just now making their filings. Joyce Morrow asked whether there are actions that the Town should take now in anticipation of Zoning Reform. Beverly Woods suggested adding some language to the Master Plan indicating that any future rewrite of the zoning bylaw be consistent with the recommendations outlined in the Master Plan.

Margaret Scarsdale complimented the Committee on their work, described the impacts of climate change and expressed an interest in seeing climate change and resiliency incorporated into each element of the Master Plan.

Tony Beady described how climate change has impact his farming operation and expressed his support for including climate change within the Master Plan.

Louise Abbot concurred with the opinions expressed by the previous speakers, and added that the community's designation as a Green Community should also be incorporated into the process.

2. Minutes of the December 13, 2018 meeting

Joe Lonergan noted a typo on pages 4-5. Based on a motion made by Steve Themelis and seconded by Joe Lonergan, the Committee approved the meeting minutes of December 13, 2018 as amended.

3. Action Item Status Review

Deb Fountain reviewed the action items, noting that there is no action needed on items 1 and 2 at this time. In terms of item 14, she sent information to the town administrator, town planner and Chuck Walkovich on the language contained in the town charter regarding meeting attendance. The town administrator indicated that it is up to Master Plan Committee chair to decide how to best proceed. Chuck Walkovich stated that he intends to talk further with the town administrator regarding the issue.

Deb Fountain stated that Diane Cronin and Rob Rand have agreed to send a notice to the Board of Selectmen and the Town Administrator in advance of the next Visioning Session, as outlined in item 28. Diane noted that the Senior Visioning Session was advertised in the Senior Center newsletter and on cable. Chuck Walkovich will confirm the availability of meeting space for the next Visioning Session prior to the upcoming Board of Selectmen meeting.

Deb Fountain stated that the remaining action items reflect tasks that will be addressed at this meeting. Diane Cronin stated that she spoke with the building inspector regarding the placement of informational signs, and then outlined the town's policy regarding the placement of such signs. Paula Terrasi added that the building inspector has agreed to allow the temporary placement of sandwich board signs at four locations.

4. Upcoming Visioning Session for Seniors

Beverly Woods reminded the Committee members that the Visioning Session for Seniors will be held tomorrow, January 11th at 9:30 AM at the Senior Center. She noted that the format will be similar to the first general visioning session. The Master Plan Committee members are welcome to attend.

5. Complete Review of the Land Use and Zoning Chapter

The Climate Change and Sustainability Work Group provided a revised memo to the Master Plan Committee containing five suggested recommendations for inclusion in the Master Plan. Ken Hartlage noted that Work Group made the revisions based on feedback from the Town Administrator. He noted that the Work Group will make recommendations on each section of the Master Plan and that it is preparing other papers. He noted that the Work Group would like climate change concepts incorporated into the introduction or an appendix to the Master Plan.

Beverly Woods commented that item 2 would fit best within the Open Space chapter of the Master Plan, while item 4 would be most appropriate in the Natural and Cultural Resources chapter. The Work Group indicated that they were comfortable with that approach.

Chuck Walkovich asked how item 5 would be established and inquired as to what development restrictions would result from such requirements. Ken Hartlage noted that the Town has design guidelines already that could be modified to include green infrastructure and other sustainability concepts. Beverly Woods noted that many communities are moving in this direction and that Pepperell is already thinking about many of these concepts as part of the stormwater management program. Jack Visniewski noted that the Planning Board can address these issues through recommendations and guidelines, rather than through hard regulations. Ken Hartlage noted that green infrastructure is typically less expensive than traditional development practices. Jack Visniewski stated that the bottom line is what matter most to the development community, and asked whether the Work Group is suggesting that the sewer system be extended. Sherrill Rosoff stated that they are not. Jack added that septic systems benefit the environment in terms of groundwater recharge, and noted that there are a lot of new technologies available.

Joe Lonergan noted that the term “minimal natural resources” is open to interpretation and suggested that it be revised. Beverly Woods suggested that item 1 be incorporated into the recommendation on page 42 of Land Use chapter regarding the sewer district. Sherrill Rosoff requested that information be provided on the importance of groundwater recharge. Beverly Woods stated that she will create a paragraph within the Issues and Opportunities section of the chapter relative to the Sewer District.

Regarding item 3, Jack Visniewski noted that a lot of local boards already require down lighting, and that lighting technology has advanced significantly. He added that the town’s regulations should be updated to address the availability of new lighting technology. Ken Hartlage noted the energy efficiencies that are realized from the new technology, such as LED. The Committee the voted to incorporate recommendations 1, 3, and 5 into the Land Use and Zoning chapter.

Jack Visniewski stated that he is concerned about the inclusion of Complete Streets in future projects. Beverly Woods outlined the state's Complete Streets policy and program, including the capital grants that are available to municipalities. Jack stated that many of the recommendations will be the responsibility of the Planning Board. Beverly Woods noted that other resources will be needed beyond the local boards and town staff, for example, the Town will likely hire a consultant to rewrite the zoning bylaw. She added that the recommendations are intended to be implemented over a ten-year period rather than all at once. Sherrill Rosoff and Renee D'Argento described Littleton's implementation committee. Diane Cronin reported on her research regarding the inclusion of vulnerability assessments in other communities.

Rob Rand commented that the recommendation to examine mixed use in the Hollis Street and Brookline Street area is not entirely new in that there was an attempt to extend the commercial zone into that area previously. He added that staying away from waterbodies and wetlands will be important, as will regulating the uses that are allowed within the district. Beverly Woods stated that identifying allowed uses will be part of the process for developing a future zoning bylaw for the district, while the Master Plan recommendation is simply to study the concept of allowing mixed use in that area. Diane Cronin suggested adding language to page 42 regarding the preservation of historical assets.

Deb Fountain requested that the recommendations be numbered. Beverly Woods stated that she will make the revisions that have been discussed and provide them to the Committee at the next meeting. Based on a motion made by Steve Themelis and seconded by Jack Visniewski, the Committee voted unanimously to complete the Land Use chapter with the agreed upon edits.

6. Update from the Climate and Sustainability Work Group

This update was covered under the previous agenda item.

7. Complete Review of Responses to the Housing Technical Paper

Jay Donovan summarized the responses from the Committee members to the housing discussion questions. He noted that many of the housing issues have been addressed in the Town's Housing Production Plan. Renee D'Argento described the number of residents and families in town that need affordable housing, and noted that there is a need for more diverse housing stock for families and seniors. Jay Donovan added that Pepperell has not seen the type of interest from major affordable housing developers that has occurred in towns further east, such as Tyngsborough, Billerica and Westford. Beverly Woods noted that some of these communities have used CPA funds to supplement affordable housing development.

Renee D'Argento stated that Pepperell can offer water and sewer infrastructure to entice developers to produce additional housing in a more concentrated fashion. Jay Donovan noted that many of the communities work with non-profit housing developers, and that they have established a housing trust.

In response to Question 4, the Committee members noted the lack of public transit service. Renee D'Argento asked how the Town might be able to get transit service to the commuter rail

and to the Tyngsborough Park and Ride lot. Beverly Woods explained that Pepperell's rural nature makes it difficult to serve with transit, from an economic perspective due to the low population density. A discussion ensued on possible options for small shuttles that would provide service to the Ayer or Lowell commuter rail station, and on the costs of funding such public transit service.

In response to Question 5, respondents identified the Peter Fitzpatrick School and the former Pepperell Paper Mill site as possible locations for housing. In response to Question 6, most respondents felt that creating additional areas for mixed use development would also be helpful, especially in the center of town. It was noted that the Housing Authority is not an active player in creating affordable housing in Pepperell. Jay Donovan described some of the non-profit housing developers in the area, such as Common Ground and the Coalition for a Better Acre.

Renee D'Argento asked if local entities other than the Housing Authority can work to create affordable housing. Jay Donovan replied that the Affordable Housing Committee could play that role once it is reactivated. An affordable housing trust could also be established to assist with the financing of such projects. A discussion on how to establish an affordable housing trust ensued.

Diane Cronin discussed the need for supportive services for those residing in affordable housing, such veterans, disabled individuals and those affected by addiction. Such services include transportation and job training. Sherrill Rosoff noted that many of these issues revolve around social equity. Renee D'Argento discussed the need for property tax assistance for certain individuals who are in need.

Renee D'Argento stated that the affordable housing units in town do not seem to be permanently protected. Jay Donovan explained that there must have a deed restriction that spans a minimum of thirty years, but that it is advisable to require a restriction that is in perpetuity.

Renee D'Argento asked whether inclusionary zoning is enacted town-wide or only in certain areas. Beverly Woods responded that the Town could establish inclusionary zoning only in certain districts or across the entire town. The approach varies from community to community. She added that Mass Housing Partnership provides free assistance to communities on this issue.

8. Overview of the Community Preservation Act (CPA)

Beverly Woods provided a handout on the CPA legislation and program. She reviewed the funding for the program, the process for a community adopting CPA, the establishment of the Community Preservation Commission (CPC), the development of the Community Preservation Plan, and the creation of an application process. She noted that Town Meeting must approve the expenditure of any CPA funds. She then reviewed the types of projects on which the funds can be expended.

Diane Cronin stated that the Town received funding from Mass Historical Commission for the painting of Town Hall in the past, which required placing an historic preservation restriction on the building. Beverly Woods noted that if CPA funds are used for historic preservation or restoration, the property owner must follow the U.S. Secretary of Interior's standards.

Renee D'Argento asked whether the Town can decide how to best distribute the funds among the categories of CPA projects. Beverly Woods responded that the money can be divide among the program categories as the Town sees fit, as long as a minimum of 10% is allocated to each category. Diane Cronin noted that most communities surrounding Pepperell have adopted CPA.

10. Open Forum

An audience member asked what criteria are used for selecting possible sites for housing, and expressed concern that such housing could stifle economic growth in the downtown area. Beverly Woods stated that most communities have found that having residential development in the downtown is beneficial, in that it provides a market and customer base for the businesses that are located there. She added that the Master Plan is very high level and will not assess the impact of future development projects that may or may not be built. Jay Donovan noted that most of properties mentioned are drawn from the Town's Housing Production Plan.

The meeting adjourned at 8:50 pm.