



Town of Pepperell

Master Plan Advisory Committee

1 Main Street, Pepperell, Massachusetts 01463-1644

Meeting Minutes-March 21, 2019

Committee Members Present:

Diane Cronin
Renee D'Argento
Tracie Ezzio
Deborah Fountain
Nancy Lebedzinski
Kenneth Morgan
Joyce Morrow
Kathryn Pries
Robert Rand
Sherrill Rosoff
Stephen Themelis
Jack Visniewski
Chuck Walkovich
Stephen Witmer

Committee Members Absent:

Ken Hartlage
Paul J. Lonergan
Amanda Nichols
Carol Quinn
David Sears
Mark Vasapolli

Others Present:

Jay Donovan, NMCOG
Beverly Woods, NMCOG

1. Minutes of the February 21, 2019 meeting

Prior to taking up the minutes, Diane Cronin stated that there should be a vote taken regarding last month's decision to eliminate the first open forum from the agenda. She then made a motion to amend the previously adopted motion allowing the public to speak at both the beginning and the end of the Master Plan Advisory Committee meeting, and to restructure the agenda so that the public is allowed to speak at the end of the meeting for fifteen minutes. The motion was seconded by Steve Themelis, and was then unanimously approved by the Committee.

Diane Cronin then stated she reviewed the Planning Board meeting tape, where the Master Plan schedule was discussed, and noted that there is concern that a lot of data is being read word for word at the meetings which consumes significant time. She added that she shares the Planning Board's concerns. She suggested a more abbreviated approach for reviewing data and comments provided by the committee members and by others. Chuck Walkovich concurred, and suggested that Committee members read the material and structure their comments so that they are on point.

Based on a motion made by Steve Themelis and seconded by Rob Rand, the minutes of the February 21, 2019 meeting were then unanimously approved.

3. Action Item Status Review

There were no updates to the list of action items.

4. Draft Housing Chapter-Updated information and comments from the Master Plan Advisory Committee members

Jay Donovan informed the Committee that information on race and ethnicity was added to the Housing Chapter as requested. He then reviewed other data updates that were incorporated within the housing section since the previous meeting, and noted that a recommendation was also added to utilize the services of Mass Housing Partnership in order to study the feasibility of adopting Inclusionary Zoning.

Renee D'Argento asked if sewer and water supply restrictions are barriers to affordable housing. Jay Donovan stated that the information in the housing section was provided by the town engineer, and noted that there are certain capacity issues within the water system. She asked if there are certain geographic areas that are impacted. Jay replied that the information provided was not that specific. Beverly Woods added that infrastructure issues will be addressed in more detail in the Facilities and Services chapter.

Sherrill Rosoff asked what one can glean from the family and non-family household data. Jay Donovan responded that it shows that female householders are increasing, while male householders are decreasing, and that the number of married couples with related children have decreased. Beverly Woods added that the increase in non-traditional households results in an increased demand for household formation, even if the overall population has not increased.

Renee D'Argento asked for clarification on the definition of a non-family household. Beverly Woods stated that this term refers to unrelated individuals that are living together.

Sherrill Rosoff commented that the section on housing burden was enlightening and asked how that information translates into a sense of urgency for affordable housing in Pepperell. Jay Donovan stated that given that Pepperell has not created any new affordable units in five years, there is a significant need. Sherrill Rosoff spoke about an Audubon presentation that she attended regarding balancing the need for housing production with land preservation. She noted that many communities at the session talked about the affordable housing crisis, and asked Jay

Donovan whether Pepperell is in a similar situation. Jay Donovan responded affirmatively and noted that Pepperell also needs a more diverse stock of market rate housing for seniors and young families. He then outlined the process for updating the town's Housing Production Plan (HPP), noting that the Affordable Housing Committee should stay engaged following completion of the HPP to ensure that the recommendations are implemented.

Renee D'Argento stated that she does not agree with the recommendation in the prior Housing Production Plan stating that Chapter 61A parcels should be considered for housing. Beverly Woods noted that the Affordable Housing Committee is limited to considering sites that the Town controls. Jay Donovan added that tax title properties are another option that can be explored. Renee D'Argento stated that she would prefer that people be allowed to stay in their homes rather than allowing tax title takings.

Sherrill Rosoff asked about the recommendation regarding Chapter 40R. Jay Donovan and Beverly Woods explained the concept of 40R and the mechanics for creating a 40R district. Sherrill Rosoff asked if the Affordable Housing Committee will work from the list of recommendations in the Master Plan, and whether there will be a public process for this activity. Jay Donovan responded that the Town will have to decide whether they want to implement each of the recommendations in the Master Plan, some of which will require Town Meeting approval. He noted that both the Board of Selectmen and the Planning Board are required to approve the Housing Production Plan.

Sherrill Rosoff asked for an overview of Inclusionary Zoning. Beverly Woods explained the concept of Inclusionary zoning, which is a tool for producing affordable housing units as a required component within a housing development over a certain size threshold. She suggested that the Town work with Mass Housing Partnership, as they provide technical assistance on this issue to local communities at no cost.

Diane Cronin suggested the term "affordability" be added to goal #5 (that was extracted from the Housing Production Plan), noting the number of seniors who will be living in poverty in the future.

Renee D'Argento asked about allowing residential uses over retail in order to create additional units in the areas where they are most desirable. Beverly Woods responded that the Town could revise the zoning bylaw to allow mixed use within those areas. This is a process that would need to be driven by the Planning Board. Renee then asked whether this could be a recommendation in the Master Plan and Housing Production Plan. Beverly Woods stated that this issue was already addressed in the Land Use chapter, and that 3-story buildings are already allowed in the downtown area. Chuck Walkovich noted that mixed-use already exists along Main Street.

Sherrill Rosoff stated that there is likely a typo in the Land Use chapter within the recommendation related to reducing the minimum lot size by half in certain areas. She noted that, as written, the recommendation would reduce the lot size in the Town Residence district from 2 acres to a half acre, which she believes was not the intent. Joyce Morrow stated that the current wording of the recommendation accurately reflects what the Committee previously agreed to. Sherrill Rosoff responded that she is concerned that this could dramatically increase

development. Joyce Morrow added that the area impacted is within walking distance of Town Hall and other facilities in the Town Center, which is important in a town without public transportation. Rob Rand added that the Town Residence district covers a large area and it is not all within walking distance. Discussion ensued.

Nancy Lebedzinski noted that it is very difficult to maintain a two-acre parcel, especially if you are a single-person household or an older person, and that she has been asked by the Senior Center to represent the senior voice. Tracie Ezzio added that if more people do not move into town taxes will skyrocket, as the Finance Committee recently discussed. Joyce Morrow noted that the valuations are not keeping pace with surrounding communities. Sherrill Rosoff stated that rezoning to a half-acre is an invitation to development that will destroy the rural character of the town. Beverly Woods stated that if the goal is preserve open space, the Town should be encouraging more OSRD projects. She added that building single-family home on two-acre lots is contrary to the objective of preserving open space.

Chuck Walkovich stated that the Town has a crisis in terms of its Housing Production Plan with the lack of progress in creating new affordable units, and noted that there is also a revenue crisis. He added that it is the Committee's job to make recommendations to address these issues, while implementation responsibility will rest with the Implementation Committee and the Planning Board. Nancy Lebedzinski added that many families who cannot afford a one-acre lot might be able to buy a half-acre lot. After additional discussion and based on a motion made by Sherrill Rosoff and seconded by Steve Themelis, the Committee voted to review recommendation #3 within the Land Use section at the end of the planning process.

Rob Rand expressed his strong support for recommendation #13, which calls for a pilot program to show how Green concepts can be incorporated into housing development.

5. Climate Change and Sustainability Work Group's Housing Chapter Comments

Sherrill Rosoff presented the Work Group's comments on the Housing Chapter, noting that their findings parallel the recommendations presented in the chapter. The shortage of workforce housing, as well as housing for seniors and those with disabilities, was highlighted. She noted that one-third of residents are housing burdened. Sherrill explained that the Work Group focused on the Urban, Suburban and Commercial residence zones. She outlined the connection between housing and economic development, and stated that allowing some forms of development along Main Street by right, rather than by special permit, would be a significant incentive for encouraging the development style that is desired, particularly from Railroad Square to the Peter Fitzpatrick School. She noted that this could also be extended down Tarbell Street, and that the development of multi-family affordable units would help the Town achieve Safe Harbor status under Chapter 40B.

Sherrill Rosoff stated that the Work Group recommendations include the development of a Work Force Housing and Zoning Plan that conserves open space. Jay Donovan asked the Work Group to define the concept of developing a Work Force Housing and Zoning Plan. Sherrill Rosoff stated that the Work Group defined the Plan in terms of demographics and income. Beverly Woods asked whether the subsidized affordable housing and zoning plan that the Work Group

references is different from the Housing Production Plan. Sherrill Rosoff stated that the Group is referring to the HPP, but is suggesting that the focus be on the factors that they have outlined, focusing on economic development and the values that the Town wants to preserve, such as rural character. Beverly Woods replied that the items that relate to design concepts, standards, zoning and land use concepts belong in the Land Use Chapter. Sherrill Rosoff responded that she understands the fact that there is overlap between the chapters and that some of the items listed by the Work Group might fit better within other sections of the document. Chuck Walkovich added that the desire is to present the information in an organized fashion to the Planning Board, and to make sure that the recommendations are achievable within a reasonable timeframe.

Sherrill Rosoff stated that form-based code relies on visualization and the creation of public spaces and could be used on Main Street. Beverly Woods responded that form-based code would be administratively difficult for Pepperell, given that there is not a lot of capacity in terms of planning and community development staff time. Sherrill Rosoff added that the goal is to provide visualization as part of the planning and approval process and to protect the historic integrity of the area. Beverly Woods stated that creating an historic district with design standards or a neighborhood conservation area is a more practical way for Pepperell to achieve those goals. Sherrill Rosoff asked whether such a recommendation could go into the housing section. Beverly Woods responded that the recommendations relative to historic preservation belong in the Natural and Cultural Resources section. She added that, in the absence of an historic district, the Town could create an overlay zoning district with design guidelines or standards. Diane Cronin added that the Town attempted to create an historic district in 2002, but it was not approved.

Sherrill Rosoff stated that the Committee was not trying to create an historic district, but was trying to respect the architecture in Railroad Square. Diane Cronin added that perhaps implementing form-based code in the Railroad Square area would be appropriate. She added that Alan Manonian, Community Development director for Ayer, has offered to make a presentation for the Committee on form-based code.

Rob Rand noted that the recommendations seem more specific than what the Committee agreed to outline within the Master Plan. He added that simply suggesting that the Planning Board study certain issues that are more broadly described within the Master Plan is more appropriate. He cited item number 5 within the Work Group's recommendations calling for a Housing and Community Development Board, and noted that there is an intent to have a Master Plan Implementation Committee. Renee D'Argento asked whether the Implementation Committee will be corralling all of the silos and applying for grants. Beverly Woods responded that the items outlined in item 5 are tasks that a Community Development department might be responsible for, but many of the items are not reflective of the type of work that should be expected of a volunteer committee. Chuck Walkovich stated that the Master Plan should present the Town's vision for the future, and not necessarily outline all of the specific tactics for getting there.

The list of recommendations were then reviewed by Beverly Woods, in terms of where each item fits within the Master Plan. She added that item #7 is a goal that is most appropriately included

the Natural and Cultural Resources chapter. It was agreed that proposed revisions would be refined and reviewed by the Committee at the April meeting.

6. Natural and Cultural Resources Technical Paper

Given time limitations, it was agreed that the Committee members will read the Natural and Cultural Resources technical paper and forward their responses to the discussion questions by April 11th, a week in advance of the April 18th meeting.

10. Open Forum

No comments were received.

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 pm.