



Town of Pepperell

Master Plan Advisory Committee

1 Main Street, Pepperell, Massachusetts 01463-1644

Draft Meeting Minutes-June 13, 2019

Committee Members Present:

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

Committee Members Absent:

Ken Hartlage
Amanda Nichols
David Sears
Mark Vasapolli

Others Present:

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

1. Minutes of the May 9, 2019 meeting

Approval of the minutes was deferred to the July meeting.

2. Action Item Status Review

Chuck Walkovich stated that he reached out to Mark Vasapolli regarding the visioning session with the business community. Jay Donovan noted that these sessions are often held in the morning for the convenience of the businesses.

3. Review Input from Agricultural Stakeholders

Beverly Woods reminded Committee members of the town's contractual obligations under the Community Compact program, which call for completion of the Natural and Cultural Resources chapter and the Open Space and Recreation chapter by the end of June. Renee D'Argento stated that Climate Change and Sustainability Work Group has formulated some recommendations similar to those provided by the agricultural stakeholders. Sherrill Rosoff explained that the Work Group spoke with Tony Beatty and Carl Hills following last month's meeting, and noted that the section of the Natural and Cultural Resources chapter dealing with soils is very important, while the Open Space chapter points out that the town has lost 41% of its farmland. Discussion ensued regarding the process for submitting comments in advance of the meeting and the need for moving forward with completing the Master Plan in a timely manner.

The Committee then reviewed the comments provided by the agricultural community. Beverly Woods noted that some items have already been included in the draft chapter, such as incorporating agriculture in the school curriculum and utilizing locally sourced food in the school lunch program. She added that the specifics on how agriculture gets folded into the curriculum are up to the school district's curriculum director.

Tony Beatty provided clarification on the recommendation to establish a community farm. He stated that this would require that the town financially support a piece of property that would be actively farmed and used for education purposes. The concept could include collaboration with private parties. Joyce Morrow stated that farms are owned and managed by families, sometimes for many generations, who work the land to earn a living. She added that the role of the town is to make sure that zoning and regulations support the continued operation of the farms, and that the possible financial support of a farm by the town is not a Master Plan issue. Renee D'Argento stated that she believes this recommendation suggests that town-owned land would be used for the community farm. Paula Terrasi noted that the Board of Selectmen have signed a five-year lease on the land between the rivers, which brings some revenue to the town. The land is part of an APR. She added that the Town does not own other properties with agricultural restrictions. Renee D'Argento suggested that the Peter Fitzpatrick School property or the Nissitissit Middle School property be explored for this purpose. Paula Terrasi stated that there would need to be discussions with the school district regarding the Nissitissit School land.

The Committee discussed the suggestion that an annual farm fair be organized. Chuck Walkovich stated that he believes the farmers should take this on. Renee D'Argento responded that this is a cultural activity that promotes the town's farming tradition. Chuck Walkovich asked why the farmers do not host such an event. Tony Beatty responded that

they are too busy, and suggested that the Agricultural Advisory Board take on this role. He added that the Advisory Board needs to be re-formed as some members have left town and others no longer seem interested. Rob Rand noted that the role and mission of the Agricultural Advisory Board is spelled out in the Natural Resources chapter and that they can present information to other town boards and committees. Beverly Woods stated that those are the roles that were approved by town meeting.

The proposed recommendations regarding the need to improve soil health and allowing farms to operate commercial composting operations were discussed. Renee D'Argento stated that farms should be able to produce compost to meet their needs, but they should not be allowed to operate a large-scale, MCGI-style commercial composting business. Kathryn Pries noted that composting and manure storage is not allowed in an aquifer protection zone. Tony Beatty stated that a license is needed for composting through the Department of Agriculture Resources. He added that some towns operate their own composting facilities. Tony also believes that the building code should require developers to landscape with six inches of topsoil. Paula Terrasi noted that the town changed its zoning so that composting facilities would be excluded, following its experiences on Nashua Road. Beverly Woods suggested that the Town carefully craft any zoning changes to explicitly spell out the types of materials that can be composted. Sherrill Rosoff stated that the Committee needs to consider whether it wants to provide farmers with access to compost. Discussion ensued. Diane Cronin suggested that the recommendations regarding depth of topsoil and use of fertilizer be added to the existing list of best management practices.

The proposed recommendation to provide a reduced water rate for agricultural water users was discussed. Paula Terrasi noted that there are state grants available to assist farmers with irrigation issues, particularly for those farms with an APR. Beverly Woods noted that the town's water infrastructure will be further discussed in the facilities and services section, and suggested incorporating a general recommendation on water security within that chapter.

Kathy Pries asked if information is available on the economic impact of agricultural on the town. Beverly Woods responded that this information is not available from MDAR.

In terms of the recommendation to allow solar farms on farmland without impacting Chapter 61A status, Tony Beatty reported that the State is considering allowing solar development as long as cropland is not impacted. Rob Rand added that the Town is developing a solar bylaw. The Committee agreed to add a recommendation that states that the town will work with the legislature to advance this initiative, as long as farmland is not adversely impacted.

The Committee decided not to recommend the establishment of a bio-mass gasification facility in town. Paula Terrasi stated that the State has removed this technology from their renewable energy portfolio as it is not clean.

4. Discussion on Proposed Revisions to the Natural and Cultural Resources Draft Chapter

Comments received from committee members were reviewed relative to the historic resources section. The comments focused on storage of town records, the status of the liberty pole, the town pound, the covered bridge, and Blake mill.

A request to add a career program at the Nashoba Valley Technical High School on Agriculture and Natural Resources/Environmental Science and link it to a community farm was discussed. Sherrill Rosoff stated that there has been a large decline in the number of farmers nationally, and the point of such a program would be to stimulate interest in agronomy and environmental science. Discussion ensued as to how best incorporate the recommendation within the Master Plan, and whether the Conservation Commission or the Agricultural Advisory Board should work with the schools on curriculum development. Paula Terrasi described the past and current education efforts of the Conservation Commission. Beverly Woods stated that she will modify the chapter to appropriately reflect the recommendation, and that a clean copy of the revised chapter will be provided at the next meeting. Steve Themelis asked if the revised draft could be made available on the website before voting on approval at the next meeting. Beverly Woods stated that she will make the revised section available as PDF.

Renee D'Argento asked that the language agreed to on forested habitats as part of previous discussion on the Land Use chapter be incorporated into the Natural and Cultural Resources. Paula Terrasi noted that such issues will be addressed under the MS4 permit and that they are discussed in the Open Space Plan. Beverly Woods stated that she will add language to the revised chapter on forested habitat.

5. Review Response to the Open Space and Recreation Technical Paper

Due to time constraints, this item was deferred until the next meeting.

7. Climate Change and Sustainability Work Group Update

Due to time constraints, this item was deferred until the next meeting.

8. EDSAT Report for Pepperell-distribution and overview

Jay Donovan provided an overview of the Economic Development Self-Assessment Tool (EDSAT) report provided to the Town of Pepperell by Northeastern University. He described the process for developing the report, including the survey that town completed and the public input process. He then reviewed the content of the report and noted that the information will be utilized in the Economic Development chapter of the Master Plan. Jay suggested that the Committee review the report prior to the next meeting. Diane Cronin stated that the Economic Development Committee's survey should also be considered in the development of the chapter. Jay responded that the survey results will also be considered.

9. Scheduling of Visioning Session for Business Community

Chuck Walkovich stated that he and Jay Donovan will continue to work on the scheduling of the Visioning Session for the business community. The session will be organized through the PBA. The PBA meetings are usually held on the first Wednesday of each month.

10. Open Forum

No comments were received. The next meeting was scheduled for July 11, 2019. The meeting adjourned at 8:35 pm.