



Town of Pepperell

Master Plan Advisory Committee

1 Main Street, Pepperell, Massachusetts 01463-1644

Meeting Minutes-June 14, 2018

Committee Members Present:

Diane Cronin
Renee D'Argento
Tracie Ezzio
Deborah Fountain
Nancy Lebedzinski
Paul J. Lonergan
Kenneth Morgan
Joyce Morrow
Amanda Nichols
Roland Nutter
Kathy Pries
Carol Quinn
Robert Rand
Sherrill Rosoff
Stephen Themelis
Chuck Walkovich
Stephen Whitmer

Committee Members Absent:

David Sears
Patricia Thorpe
Mark Vasapolli
Jack Visniewski

1. Introduction of the Advisory Committee

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 pm. Co-Chairman Chuck Walkovich outlined the operating rules for the Committee, noting that the length of the meetings will be limited to two hours. He added that Open Forum is available to Committee members and residents, and any topic may be discussed during that portion of the agenda. The remainder of the meeting will focus on the agenda topics, in order to keep the discussion focused and to maintain the project schedule. Joyce Morrow inquired as to whether having a Master Plan in place would strengthen the town's position when applying for state and federal grants. Beverly Woods responded that tying a grant request to recommendations outlined in the Master Plan would make future grant applications more competitive. Sherrill Rosoff asked for more specific examples of grant

programs that the town might be missing out on. Beverly Woods cited the MassWorks program and Housing Choice capital grants as examples.

Chuck Walkovich asked that Committee members introduce themselves when asking a question or making a comment to help with the minutes. Renee D'Argento stated that it took six months to establish the Committee, so therefore, NMCOG has not undertaken any work for six months. Beverly Woods stated that this is not true, and added that NMCOG staff has been compiling and analyzing data, conducting research and working on the draft land use technical paper during this time period. Chuck Walkovich then outlined the process used by the Planning Board to select a consultant, assemble funding, and establish a scope of work and contract. Renee D'Argento asked whether NMCOG's contract could be extended. Beverly Woods explained that the time limitations are tied to the grant programs that are funding the work, noting that the DLTA XI funds will expire at the end of the calendar year. She added that NMCOG may receive additional DLTA funds in January, however, it depends on whether the program is included in the FY 19 State budget which is still being developed by the legislature.

Renee D'Argento asked that the Committee consider establishing subcommittees to focus on specific areas. Chuck Walkovich stated that the Committee is set up so that committee members can get together as long as they adhere to the open meeting law and public notification requirements. He added that he does not feel it is appropriate for subcommittees to perform technical work, given that this is the role of NMCOG. He noted that it is his opinion that subcommittees would slow down the process.

Deborah Fountain asked why the Committee is only meeting once a month. Chuck Walkovich stated that the frequency of meetings allows NMCOG to prepare the technical information that guides the process. He also noted the challenges in finding more than one meeting date per month that will work for 21 members. Beverly Woods noted that once the technical papers are delivered, the Committee members will have "homework" to do during the period between meetings. She then explained the discussion questions that will be included with each technical paper.

The Committee members then introduced themselves and described their interests relative to the Master Plan.

2. Open Forum

Bruce Wetherbee asked whether the Town currently has a Master Plan. Chuck Walkovich and Steve Themelis noted that the existing Master Plan is out of date, although there have been zoning revisions enacted since it was completed. Mr. Wetherbee noted that he has reviewed Master Plans from other communities where subcommittees were formed, and inquired as to why Pepperell couldn't do the same. Mr. Walkovich stated that the Planning Board decided to structure the process without subcommittees. Mr. Wetherbee asked whether the Planning Board or the Committee members are in charge of the process. Mr. Walkovich responded that the Planning Board is responsible for preparing the Master Plan under state statute, and added that town counsel opinion will be sought on the issue. Mr. Wetherbee inquired about the absence of the town planner. Mr. Nutter noted that he has resigned, adding that he was present earlier in the

evening but left following an interaction with a committee member. He asked whether there is a place where supplemental materials for the Master Plan can be found. Beverly Woods noted that many of the materials are on the NMCOC website. She added that the materials produced through the Master Plan process could be posted on the town's website. Mr. Wetherbee asked whether the Town could apply for additional DLTA funds for the project, assuming the program is included in the state budget. Beverly Woods indicated that the Town could apply assuming the funding is available.

Ron Rand expressed an interest in investigating where climate change might fit into the Master Plan process. He provided a handout to the Committee members on the issue. He suggested that a subcommittee on climate change be established that would look at the entire Master Plan from that perspective. Renee D'Argento added that she would like to call it a climate change and sustainability committee.

Sherrill Rosoff noted the expertise of committee members on healthcare and elder care. Beverly Woods noted that these issues are not addressed in a Master Plan. Ms. Rosoff asked whether the scope of the plan could be expanded to include these areas. Beverly Woods noted that this topic is important and complicated and deserving of its own study. She noted that healthcare is not part of any community master plan. Ms. Rosoff stated that this does not mean Pepperell should not include this issue within its Master Plan. Mr. Walkovich stated that the Planning Board has not discussed this topic and that it will be raised at a future meeting. He added that the Planning Board has followed the Master Plan framework called out in Massachusetts General Laws.

Amanda Nichols asked for additional information on the Master Plan Committees scope and charge. Beverly Woods explained that this information was provided during the first committee meeting. Ms. Nichols suggested that another opportunity to review this information be provided for new members. Beverly Woods stated that she would be happy to meet with the new members on this issue.

Roland Nutter noted that there are only certain things that the Town can address, particularly in areas such as healthcare. Sherrill Rosoff noted that there are huge concerns over the impacts of climate change on public health in terms of respiratory illness and tick borne diseases. She added that the Town's role may be in the form of public education. Roland Nutter noted that the Board of Health takes on those types of responsibilities.

Deborah Fountain stated that she is confused about the authority of the Committee. She asked whether everything needs to go to the Planning Board before decisions can be made, and added that it would seem that the Master Plan Committee should decide whether it wants to form subcommittees. Chuck Walkovich stated that it is his view that responsibility rests with the Planning Board and he will confirm this with town counsel. Beverly Woods noted that the state statute is clear that the Planning Board is charged with developing the Master Plan and approval of the document rests exclusively with that body.

Renee D'Argento stated that the needs of seniors, such as the need for transportation to medical appointments, are relevant to the Master Plan. Beverly Woods noted that transportation is a component of the Master Plan, so transportation for seniors can be addressed in the document.

However, topics related to epidemiology, disease prevention, opioid addiction and the delivery of healthcare services will not be addressed in the document.

3. Overview of Open Meeting Law (town counsel)

In the absence of town counsel, Beverly Woods provided a brief overview of open meeting law, citing the following:

- Meeting notices and agendas must be posted with the Town Clerk 48 hours in advance;
- Minutes must be taken, approved by the committee or subcommittee, and the approved minutes must be provided to the Town Clerk;
- Meeting discussion must follow the advertised agenda; and
- Discussions and deliberations among Committee members should not take place outside of a meeting. This includes by email or on social media. All email and social media postings relevant to the work of the Committee are considered part of the public record, and the Town must maintain copies of these materials under public records law.

4. Minutes of the April 19th and May 10th meetings

Steve Themelis made a motion to approve the April 19th and May 10th meetings. Joe Lonergan requested that the April 19th meeting minutes be amended to reflect the fact that he was in attendance. Stephen Whitmer indicated that he was also present at the April 19th meeting. The Committee approved the minutes of April 19th as amended and approved the May 10th minutes as presented.

5. Review of the Revised Draft Survey and Discussion of Distribution Methods

Beverly Woods reviewed the revised draft survey. A discussion ensued regarding the wording of the public transportation item on page 5, in terms of affordability and energy efficiency. The Committee determined that the item would simply read “public transportation” in order to determine whether Pepperell residents would like to see public transit service within the community.

Given the resignation of the town planner, it was determined that Paula Terrasi will collect any completed hardcopies of the survey. Mechanisms for distributing the survey were discussed.

The option of having residents provide their name and address was discussed, to ensure that each person only completes one survey. Beverly Woods noted that SurveyMonkey restricts access to one response per IP address unless the Committee were to decide otherwise. Amanda Nichols asked whether a vanity URL could be used to create the link to the survey. Beverly Woods stated that she would work with the NMCOG GIS specialist to ensure that the link is reasonable in length and logical.

Amanda Nichols suggested adding a question on income level and asked whether it will be possible to cross-tabulate the data that is collected. Beverly Woods responded that the Committee will receive the compiled results for each individual question, and that this information will be supplemented in each chapter by other data sources, such as U.S. Census

data. Amanda Nichols added that she believes it would be helpful to correlate household income with the responses to the various questions. Roland Nutter questioned whether people might be reluctant to share information on their income level. Beverly Woods noted that the income data would only reflect those who responded to the survey and not the overall community. Diane Cronin stated that the Economic Development Advisory Committee survey helped uncover issues related to retaining young people. The survey is available on the town's website. Amanda Nichols suggested that the age of the person completing the survey be requested.

Paula Terrasi noted that there has been discussion about sending out a survey for students. Beverly Woods stated that a separate survey could be developed for students. The survey would be distributed in the fall when school is back in session. Renee D'Argento stated that she would like to see more information on the Master Plan Advisory Committee website.

Joyce Morrow made a motion that page 5 of the survey be revised to address the public transportation issue, and otherwise accept the revised draft as final. The motion was seconded by Steve Themelis. Stephen Whitmer asked whether the high school survey responses would be isolated. Beverly Woods responded affirmatively, and noted that only about half of the high school seniors in Dracut completed the entire survey. Mr. Whitmer stated that finding ways to retain young people seems relevant to the Master Plan. Renee D'Argento made a motion to amend the original motion by adding a question requesting the age category of the person completing the survey, and by adding a question on household income. Nancy Ledbedzinski seconded the motion on the amendment. The Committee voted unanimously to accept the amendment. The amended motion was then unanimously approved by the Committee.

6. Results of the April 19th Visioning Session

Jay Donovan reviewed a memo provided to the Committee outlining the results of the Vision Session held on April 19th. He noted that the top five strengths identified by participants were the Library, Senior Center, Fire and Police Departments, Open Space/Rural Character, and conservation land. He pointed out that the results reflect the opinions of those in the room and may not reflect the opinions of the overall community. He added that the written survey will capture input from a much larger portion of the community. Jay went on to describe the top weakness identified through the Visioning Session, which included the lack of senior housing, followed by the lack of transparency and responsiveness by town government, the need for better communication by town government and the need for a better website, odd shaped lots, and lack of a sports center. Top opportunities included the redevelopment of the Peter Fitzpatrick School, setting an open space preservation target of 25%, expanding Pepperell Community Arts, redevelopment of the mill site, and community farming. The top threats included overdevelopment and the loss of resources, small town politics, town government ignoring the public, lack of communication, and failure to attract youth.

Renee D'Argento stated that some people at the Visioning Session took extra dots, which she believes skewed the results. Jay Donovan asked where specifically the results were skewed and noted that some participants did not use their dots. She added that the input should be organized by themes and chapters. Beverly Woods responded that each chapter developed will tie the input together by subject and noted that future visioning sessions will be topic specific. Diane Cronin

agreed that the dots were not managed. She noted that the data does not tell you how important historical issues are to residents, for example. Chuck Walkovich stated that he will take responsibility for not managing the dots, and those who used the extra dots also bear some responsibility. He noted that every system for gathering input comes with some bias. Beverly Woods stated that Committee members are giving too much weight to the importance of the exercise and added that even those items with low scores will be addressed in the Master Plan. Chuck Walkovich added that the data can either be used or discarded. Rob Rand asked if the next Visioning Session on economic development, land use and housing will use the same system. Beverly Woods added that color-coding dots will not be used for the remaining sessions.

7. Scheduling of Next Visioning Session

Deborah Fountain suggested having a separate date for the next Visioning Session, rather than holding it on a regular Committee meeting date. Renee D'Argento asked when the survey will go out. Beverly Woods responded that the town administration will need to determine if the survey can be distributed with the tax bills. If so, it will depend on when the tax bills are mailed.

Joyce Morrow noted that the Committee needs to take responsibility for getting residents to the next Visioning Session. She added that residents need to understand that the Master Plan will benefit the community overall, and that the Committee is just the facilitator for the process. She further noted that some of the wonderful ideas that have been brought forward are not part of the Master Plan but should be addressed through other town departments and boards. Paula Terrasi noted that the town department heads need to be notified of the Master Plan meetings. Diane Cronin stated that communication is important and that there should be a clear strategy for making people aware of the survey and of future opportunities for community engagement. Various options for getting out information were then discussed.

The next Visioning Session was scheduled for September 20, 2018.

8. Overview of the Massachusetts Sustainability Principles

Chuck Walkovich suggested deferring this item until the next meeting due to time constraints. Rob Rand stated that he believes planning needs to be done to address climate change and recommended the formation of a subcommittee. Chuck Walkovich stated that he wants to consult the Planning Board and town counsel on the issue of subcommittees. Beverly Woods provided an overview of the state's Municipal Vulnerability Program, which provides grants for communities to assess their vulnerability to the impacts of climate change. Rob Rand added that he would like to include non-Master Plan Committee residents as members of the subcommittee, and that the subcommittee would research vulnerability. Chuck Walkovich stated that, assuming the Planning Board and town counsel agree, he is not opposed to forming such a subcommittee as long as the subcommittee complies with all open meeting and public records laws.

9. Open Forum

Deborah Fountain distributed a handout with action items from past meetings. The handout also contains a motion intended to hold Committee members accountable by tracking and replying in writing to all comments brought up at the Committee meetings and at public sessions. The written replies would be posted on the town website. She asked that this be topic be added as an agenda item at the next meeting.

The Committee voted to adjourn at 8:53 pm.