

MASTER PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE

Meeting Minutes

Thursday September 24, 2020 at 7:00 pm

On line via Zoom

The meeting was called to order at 7:20 pm.

Members Present: Cia Boynton, Mary Ciummo, Bob Roemer, Ken Troup, Brian Boyle, Abby Ayotte, Megan Irvin (?), Mark Sprague, Stacia Downey, Molly Myers, Panny Gerken

Others Present: Erica Uriarte, Nicki McGachey, Mark O'Hagan

After a motion by Panny and a second by Molly, the minutes of the August 27, 2020 meeting were approved without comments 10-0-0.

Task Group Status: Each task group provided a brief update of its status. Groups not listed had nothing additional to report:

Housing has had several meetings and prepared the Ted-talk covered later in this meeting.

Land Use will be meeting in October to identify the maps that will be needed for the Master Plan.

Municipal group continues to gather information.

Climate change – Sharon Shepela will be joining the group.

Finances group has drafted FAQs about taxes and obtained feedback from town officials. The draft will be reviewed by MPSC members before being made public.

Outreach shared the article in the Item about Master Planning.

Survey drafted a newspaper article about some survey results. There may be university resources available to process the qualitative results of the narrative responses to questions.

Transportation participated in a meeting of Bolton, Lancaster, and Stow COAs with MART concerning proposed centralized dispatch with the objective of more efficient COA van use. Wider use of the COA van will need selectmen approval.

Water and sewer noted that septic capacity is not a problem in Bolton center because of recent technology advances. The group is investigating costs of septic replacements.

Quarterly Report Sep 30- Dec 30: Bob noted that a brief quarterly report from the MPSC to the Planning Board and Selectmen will be needed.

Next steps in the master planning process: Brian proposed that monthly TED talks be converted into the beginnings of section drafts for the Master Plan. He proposed a template outline be prepared for what a section should cover, acknowledging that variations would be

needed for each task group. He recommended a writing team so that the plan would be written in a single voice. Ken, Molly, and Cia volunteered to work with Brian as the writing team. The first section draft will be Transportation, based on the August Ted Talk, with a goal of having the draft during October. The draft will address the status quo. Bob noted that taxes and housing could be similarly drafted and that in drafting sections, the committee needs to evaluate potential opportunities and next steps that the committee can then discuss with the public for their input.

Potential consultant support – MAPC: Bob reported that there have been pandemic-related delays in MAPC's processing of Bolton's request for consulting assistance for the Master Plan. It could be another 60 days before funding is available. However, Lizzie Gobbel of MAGIC is going to set up a free Zoom meeting on master planning data that is available from MAPC as well as practical approaches to getting public input. Members of the MPSC were thrilled with this offer.

Cia emphasized the importance of researching comparable towns and the region for how Bolton compares and for potential regional solutions to planning problems. Erica pointed out that the MAPC website Data Commons section has relevant town and region data. Bob suggested working not only with MAPC but also with the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) that covers the towns to the west and northwest of Bolton. Obtaining data and information from MAPC and MRPC will be individual task group responsibilities.

Master Plan Teach In's or TED Talks - Housing: The committee agreed that the Ted talks will be put on the town website. Erica will edit the presentation out of meeting recordings and include copies of the slide presentations. Stacia then presented an overview of housing in Bolton, noting first the collective work effort from Mark O'Hagan, Chris Rogers and Erica Uriarte in compiling information for the presentation. Stacia noted that the housing market has rebounded and that Bolton homes are more popular because of space that can be used for working and learning from home. Prices are higher than in 2019. Her focus in the talk was on affordable housing, of which there is a shortage in Bolton. Stacia noted that only 5 of 72 sales this year have been under \$400,000 and that only an average of 17% of sales in the last five years have been below \$400,000. She stated that the data shows there is a relative lack of alternatives for meeting low to moderate income needs in Bolton's housing.

Stacia reviewed some of the housing-related zoning initiatives of the last 15 years, noting that the recent inclusionary zoning, mixed use overlay, and barn/outbuilding conversion bylaws have not been used very much. She mentioned a bylaw consideration called Open Space Residential Design that is similar to the current FOSPRD bylaw and would have 50% open space protection with mixed housing types in more dense development to promote both protection and housing options. She mentioned five state programs to which Bolton belongs that have funding available that can affect housing and other developments or improvements within the town. The challenge she said was to protect rural character, as desired by survey respondents, while providing a mix of housing to meet the needs of first-time buyers and desires of current homeowners to downsize but stay in Bolton.

In the discussion period that followed, everyone agreed that a charrette was needed to further discuss housing options with the public. Mark O'Hagan provided the MPSC with his insights involving 40B developments and the economics related to building a housing development in Bolton where there is neither public water nor septic. He said the key to development size is the 10,000 gallon septic limitation, above which solutions are cost prohibitive. He noted that 10,000 gallons essentially allows 66 units for age restricted housing; 30 – 40 units for family housing depending on bedroom counts, which is considered a mid-sized project by developers and could be sited on 15 to 25 acres.

MPSC attendees were very complimentary of Stacia's presentation and the additional thoughts provided by Mark O'Hagan. Bob proposed that the MPSC initiate a meeting with Harvard to obtain additional insights on mixed housing developments in Harvard, building on an excellent charrette meeting in Harvard on the subject that he and others attending in February.

In closing, Bob again emphasized the importance of our meeting with and obtaining information from MRPC to help with the master planning. With no other business before the MPSC, Panny moved and Mark seconded that the meeting be adjourned. It was approved 9-0-0 and the meeting adjourned at 8:55 pm.