

Minutes of 4/5/24- Master Plan Steering Committee Meeting

Roll Call of Attendees- Chair: Joeci Gilcrest (Member-at-Large.), Vice-Chair: Tim Willsmer (Planning Board), Evan Watters (Finance Com.), Karin Menard (Parks), Debbie Lincoln (Council on Aging), Kim Duffy (Green Communities), Lou Franco (Select Board), Gerald Reid, Carol Archambault (School Committee), Pete Lincoln (PACC), and Rami el Samahy (OverUnder).

Public Comment: Debbie L. asked for clarification on the number of members on the committee and any vacancies. In the Master Plan Steering Committee charge, it states 6 members appointed by the Select Board with 1 vacancy. Joeci said it was stated incorrectly and has been corrected. They have 2 vacancies for members at large and need a member from the ZBA, which she has contacted. Debbie also pointed out that they all need to be sworn in to the committee and Joeci suggested a town-wide training for running committees.

Discussion on Public Gathering Space – Joeci noted that she sent a request to Michael Ray Jeffreys for a list of all town owned properties and he provided a map noting those locations.

Michael Ray Jeffreys (1170 Mass Ave.)- reported that the Select Board updated their appointment policy and are working on a handbook for committees, which they plan to finalize by Summer. He noted that most of the properties under the Select Board are relatively small, with large properties transferred to Conservation. There are 2 large parcels remaining. The first is a 111 acre parcel (the former Woodruff property) which has multiple ways to come in from Fairview and Leominster Rd. Most of it is wooded but there are a good 30-40 acres that is currently farmed. Parcel #26 is a 40 acre parcel at the corner of Pleasant Street, with access between homes which would be challenging. They would need to negotiate with the farmer for possible access through #23. Parcel #8 has 56 acres of woods and is mostly wet. It connects to many abutters and would need development of trails. Northfield Park, under the Parks Dept, is flat and has good access off Northfield Rd. The 64 acres on Northfield Rd could possibly use parking at the golf course. Michael Ray said the Parks property would be more ideal but parking would be an issue. He suggested people park at the schools and do shuttles.

Any development of town property would be funded through the taxpayers but there are no plans currently. The biggest hurdle is money. One example is 30 School Street where the old primary school was torn down. There was a proposal to redevelop the site as a community gathering place and would cost \$5 Million. The town turned it down at Town Meeting. Michael added that projects take many years and they need to benefit all demographics. He noted that Social Media is not always the best way to get people involved—it is better to hold public meetings to get people talking to friends and neighbors. There was a question about 27 Youngs Rd. (Landfill) and Michael Ray replied that 5-10 acres are used for leaves and brush. They want to add solar panels there also.

In regard to **Municipal buildings**, the number #1 barrier is money, which would be debt exclusion. Also in order to get a developer/buyer for a building, they need to develop an engineered plan. The only proposal that was accepted by the town was to sell the Brooks House for \$1, with the buyer moving the house but they had no takers. They created a TC Passios reuse committee to make a Community building, consolidating all town offices there. When the Pandemic hit, all prices spiked. Now it would cost \$28-30 Million to rehab the building, of which \$14 Million is just for code updates. Another plan was to use the current Town Hall for all meetings, using both floors. The Ritter Building would be renovated for the Superintendent and School District offices. An annex would be added to the Ritter for town offices. Building the office building would be \$5 Million and the goal is to do a debt exclusion next year for this project. In regard to TC Passios, they could preserve the front and demolish the back wings. Turkey Hill School is in better shape and would be an option if a new school is looked at. The area where the old primary school was located would become a parking area. He added that voters get concerned when they hear the total costs for the projects, but the town needs to have a plan when they abandon a building rather than waiting years to do something.

Pete Lincoln asked for options for the 300th Anniversary Committee events. Michael Ray replied to look at Marshall Park and also the areas on Northfield Rd., as well as on Pleasant St.

Update from OverUnder- Rami screen-shared the list of Values and Goals.

Values: Lunenburg should be neighborly, agricultural, green, have Community Space, Educational, Safe and Sustainable.

Goals: – Support a range of housing options for all ages and income levels.

- Protect farmland and support farmers
- Encourage commercial development within existing commercial area.
- Build upon efforts to improve natural open spaces and recreational opportunities.
- Support community gathering spaces and civic participation.
- Optimize use of municipal buildings and properties.
- Improve School facilities
- Foster a safe and resilient Town infrastructure.

Rami stated they will roll it out as a draft and incorporate into a survey later for community feedback. They want to roll out the next survey at Town Meeting and get feedback for the end of May Public Meeting. The next survey would collect strategies for achieving the goals, with space for additional comments. Rami added that he could send the Committee a "mock" survey for feedback and revise the survey accordingly.

Eric (RKG) – Priorities: Housing- An aging population is looking for accessible, affordable and amenable options.

- The need to consider expanding housing for lower income residents
- Consider housing as part of the village center.

Joeci pointed out that young families are looking for smaller houses with some land, but developers are building large houses that young families cannot afford. Evan added that 5 large houses are being built on a 32 acre parcel – developers are scooping up land quickly. Eric suggested zoning changes and cluster subdivision, with smaller houses and open space. The Committee discussed the unaffordable housing issue in Lunenburg and Carol noted that there has not been major growth in the school system despite the large homes being built.

Economic Development- Eric noted Lunenburg has seen growth in Healthcare, Construction, Manufacturing, Retail and Food services in the past 10 years. He asked the Committee if those are the areas that they want to continue to grow in the Town Center, Mass Ave/Electric Ave and Leominster Shirley Rd. Evan noted that there are retail spaces available but new businesses are not moving in. Joeci and Kim suggested looking at any obstacles to opening businesses and how to help new businesses to move here.

Transportation- Expand sidewalks and bike facilities – Eric suggested having a capital fund for these upgrades. Evan noted there is \$1.9 Million in Chapter 90 funds but no one seems to know what the plan is for these. Eric asked if the town would be willing to invest in pedestrian friendly changes to the Town Center but it may mean less on-street parking and narrower roads. Carol stated that there are no sidewalks east of the Middle/High School on 2A. The same is true for Rt. 13 and it seems there is an issue with sidewalks on state roads. Eric suggested partnering with Mass DOT to use Chapter 90 funds. Evan added that this is the time to involve local legislators to obtain funds. Carol noted that adding sidewalks will take away some lawn from properties. Eric noted the Council on Aging is having trouble getting a 2nd van to provide transportation and questioned if the town would look at a cost-sharing model with Regional Transportation. Joeci suggested approaching it as transportation for all -not just seniors.

Capital Spending- Eric asked if with population growth, is there a balance of capital spending for school and town building repairs/upgrades, operations, and staff. Karin replied she is not sure how they can insure proper staffing and they are looking for a 2 ½ override for the schools. The elementary school is also an issue. Carol added that there just is not enough money so they do the best they can. Evan added that the town has a substantial stormwater issue and the Water Department is looking for \$32 Million to address PFAS.

2002 Master Plan Presentation – Kim Duffy presented an overview of the last Master Plan done in 2002 and noted other plans were done in 1961, 1983, and 1998. The Master Plan developed Envision 2007 with priorities of --

- developing an active community concept
- developing programs/policies to preserve Lunenburg's community character
- create & develop effective fiscal policy -seek alternative funding and plan for Economic Development
- upgrade & maintain municipal services and facilities- develop sewer, transportation and trash pick-up, provide variety of housing or shared housing, improve town road system.

Kim noted that they have completed about ¼ of the goals and completed the town road improvement goal. She reviewed the recommendations and actions from Envision 2007, noting that about ½ have been worked on. The Committee discussed what they could do better. Joeci suggested having all the Committee chairs meet to exchange

information and asked what they could do for the future generations of Lunenburg. Kim suggested making all the Committees aware of the Master Plan outcome and to revisit the plan more frequently.

May 30th Plan Lunenburg Public Meeting – Joeci suggested having it at Smokestack Coffee Roasters at 6pm and all agreed. The survey will launch on May 4th and the data will be presented at the May 30th meeting. Rami stated the public meeting will be used to illicit recommendations and what people like or do not like. Over the summer, they will test and visualize the data. In the fall, they will obtain more evaluations from the community in the 4th survey. Joeci noted that Rami and his team will use exercises during the May 30th meeting to get people to discuss ideas with each other. They will organize recommendations that they find important and this will get deeper than the surveys. Rami will create a flyer for the meeting and Joeci suggested adding a description about the meeting. Evan suggested having a table at the Town Election on 5/18 also. The Committee discussed finding a permanent location for the large Town Display. The Library could do something if it was multi-use and temporary. Rami said he would talk to the Library Director and the Committee will discuss this in future meetings. Kim suggested finding a way to incorporate it into the floor somewhere.

Committee Comment – none.

Motion: Tim W.

Second: Carol A.

To adjourn at 9:25pm.

Roll Call Vote: Carol, Kim, Tim, Joeci, Evan and Lou- all aye.

Respectfully submitted,

**Jane L. Ranley
Minutes Clerk**