

APPROVED

PLANNING COMMISSION
PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING MINUTES
Monday, May 23, 2011
Westbrook Public Library – Community Room

Members Present: Phil Bassett, Marilyn Ozols, Ashley Jones, Marie Farrell, Lisbeth Waldron(alt.), Robert Furno (alt.)

Also Present: Meg Parulis, Town Planner; Nancy Rudek, Zoning Official; Jason Vincent, Planimetrics; Glenn Chalder, Planimetrics; Conservation Commission Chairman, Tom O'Dell; Zoning Commission Chairman, Tony Marino; Board of Selectmen Members, Noel Bishop, John Hall and Chris Ehlert.

1. Presentation of draft Plan of Conservation and Development – *Jason Vincent, Planimetrics*

The meeting commenced at 7:05 p.m. with welcome and introductory remarks by Town Planner, Meg Parulis. She thanked members of the Steering Committee for their hard work and dedication over a period of 2 ½ years working with the consultant to develop the draft Plan. She also gave special acknowledgement to Tom Elliott, a member of the Steering Committee, for his contribution of the sketches heading each of the chapters in the plan citing a comment received from the Regional Planning Agency that “the drawings perhaps best portray the vision that is put forth in the text”.

Ms. Parulis also noted that no priorities have been set with regard to implementation of recommendations in the plan. The setting of priorities and assignment of responsibility to implement recommendations will be completed after the Plan is adopted by an Implementation Committee. In response to some preliminary comments, she wanted to make clear that the plan is intended to guide decisions and does not become “law” unless enacted by Regulation or Ordinance. She went on to introduce Mr. Jason Vincent with the planning firm, Planimetrics, who worked tirelessly with the Committee and staff to develop the draft Plan.

Mr. Vincent proceeded with a powerpoint presentation starting with an outline of how the plan was developed and organized, followed by a summary of demographic trends and population projections. He then gave a chapter by chapter review, highlighting key goals and strategies to achieve them. Where recommended policies were geographically represented on a map, he related the map to the goals and strategies contained in the plan.

At the conclusion of his presentation, he opened the floor to questions and comments from the attendees.

Ms. Nancy Moore expressed her concern about the boundaries depicted in the Plan for the Town Center. While she supports plans to enhance the Town Center, she noted that several single family residential neighborhoods were within the boundary, including her own. She indicated that she does not want to see any commercialization of these neighborhoods. She requested that the boundaries be revised to include properties immediately adjacent to Boston Post Road.

Ms. Vivian Partridge inquired as to whether the plan encourages accessory apartments as a means to allow people on a fixed income to remain in their homes by generating income and to provide affordable housing options for renters. She also thought that mixed uses with residential apartments above commercial uses should be promoted. Mr. Vincent responded that the Plan does recommend both of these strategies. Ms. Rudek offered that the Zoning Commission is currently working on regulations to allow accessory apartments.

Mr. Bishop asked what the three most important things the Selectmen could do to see that the Plan is implemented. Mr. Vincent responded that the first step is for the Selectmen to officially endorse the Plan. Next, to appoint an implementation committee to set priorities, assign responsibility and monitor progress. Lastly, to support implementation by funding capital improvements as recommended in the plan.

Mr. Hall asked for clarification on the re-evaluation of Open Space as described by Mr. Vincent. Mr. Vincent relayed that some properties acquired for Open Space were not legally restricted by a Conservation Easement or other legal mechanism which could result in future conflicts regarding use of the property.

Mr. Mark Leas expressed frustration with the building permit process and the importance of maintaining adequate staffing and other resources to reach stated goals. He felt that the building permit process should be made more efficient and suggested written guidelines for applicants.

Mr. Eugene Barton felt that the Town Center was not attractive and inquired as to what other communities such as Madison had done to make their downtowns inviting. Mr. Vincent responded that most communities implement some form of design review for new development coupled with preservation of historic buildings.

Ms. Terry Alaimo asked if scenic roads coincided with recommended bicycle routes and questioned whether bicyclists could be accommodated safely on some of the roads designated as scenic due to narrow widths. Mr. Vincent said the maps had been developed independently, but by virtue of the fact that the roads are scenic, recreational bicyclists will be attracted. If the Town chooses to make the roads more bicycle friendly, the elements that make the road scenic will need to be preserved.

Tom Elliot wanted participants to know that the update of the plan was required by statute and failure to adopt the plan would disqualify the Town receiving discretionary State funding.

At the conclusion of the public comments, the meeting was adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Meg Parulis, Town Planner