



MASTER PLAN UPDATE COMMITTEE
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Meeting Minutes
April 22, 2015
7:00 PM
Grange Meeting Room, Town Hall, 29 Middle Road

Members Present:

Voting Members Present:

John Markiewicz, Chair (Planning Board)
Les Fox, Vice Chair (Board of Selectmen)
Marie Cannon (Board of Health)
Bryon Clemence (Agricultural Commission)
David Follett (Conservation Commission)
Frank Powers (Council on Aging)

Ex-Officio Members Present:

Adam Duchesneau (Town Planner)
Alan Rohwer (Historical Commission)
Police Chief Warren Ryder
Selina Shaw, Town Administrator
Fire Chief Randolph White

Others in Attendance:

Christine Madore, Metropolitan Area Planning Council
Owen Neville

Voting Members Absent:

Mitzi Garcia-Weil (Recreation Commission)
Rebecca Morris (Energy Committee)
Al Murphy (Housing Board)

The Chair called the meeting to order at 7:09 PM.

Meeting Minutes of March 25, 2015

Mr. Fox MADE a MOTION to approve the minutes of March 25, 2015 as amended by Mr. Powers. Mr. Markiewicz SECONDED the MOTION. All members voted in favor and Ms. Cannon was absent from the vote.

Correspondence

Mr. Duchesneau indicated the Master Plan Update Committee (MPUC) had not received any correspondence since their last meeting.

Draft Economic Development Section Discussion

Ms. Madore presented the information which had been posted on the Boxborough 2030 website regarding economic development. She noted the Economic Development Surveys had closed on April 19th and she still had a number of open-ended comments she needed to sort through. Mr. Powers requested that Ms. Madore provide the open-ended comments to the MPUC for their review and Ms. Madore stated she would make them available. Ms. Madore then indicated she wanted to get the MPUC's reactions to the survey results and get the Committee's thoughts on particular strategies and goals for economic development based on the survey responses.

At this time Mr. Neville arrived at the meeting.

Ms. Madore noted approximately 30 to 40 businesses had responded to the Business Survey. She discussed some Community Profile Quick Facts for economic development for the town. Mr. Follett asked how “unemployed” was defined in the data. Ms. Madore stated she was assuming this meant people who were not on a payroll and that the data came from the U.S. Census. Ms. Shaw stated she felt the unemployment percentage that was listed was a bit high for Boxborough. Mr. Follett noted self reporting data is not a good way to collect data, which is what the American Community Survey data appeared to be.

At this time Ms. Cannon arrived at the meeting.

Mr. Markiewicz noted that snap shot data is probably about as accurate as the information was going to get. He also stated that each piece of data should be sourced so readers know where the data came from. Ms. Madore then continued on with her presentation noting that approximately 2,600 people travel to Boxborough each day for their job. Mr. Follett stated Cisco Systems, Inc. should be highlighted as a major employer in town. Ms. Shaw asked if Fiscal Year 2015 data could be used and Ms. Madore stated it could be as soon as it became available. Mr. Fox reiterated the unemployment figure needed to be reexamined and adjusted. Mr. Follett pointed out Boxborough is very small compared to Acton and a ratio comparison of employment would be more effective. Mr. Markiewicz felt the total number of jobs in each community and the jobs per capita data should both be examined.

Mr. Fox stated the average tax bill per household should be highlighted. Mr. Powers agreed and wanted to know what the average tax bill was for a single-family dwelling in Boxborough. Mr. Follett suggested perhaps this could be addressed by simply looking at a real estate website to get a sense of what the average tax bill is in the community. Mr. Fox encouraged Ms. Madore to look at the information which had already been compiled for the Housing Production Plan.

Economic Development Survey Results

Ms. Madore then went over the Economic Development Survey Results she had compiled. Mr. Fox stated the most striking item for him was that only 9.5% of the respondents worked in Boxborough. Mr. Follett felt the business owner responses should be clarified between those who have businesses in Boxborough and those who live in town but have businesses in other communities. Mr. Markiewicz indicated the Committee should look at the age breakdown and then at the various responses.

Mr. Fox felt the message he was seeing in the responses was that aspects of people’s quality of life are enhanced through the amenities that economic development brings, as opposed to economic development simply raising the local tax revenue. Mr. Follett noted there appeared to be two viewpoints to economic development. The first being the perception that building new space will help economic development but it could also drive existing empty spaces down to nothing. The second viewpoint was that small development will increase the quality of life, but it will not have a large impact on the tax revenue. Mr. Fox felt more people viewed economic development as a quality of life enhancement as opposed to a tax bill proposition.

Mr. Clemence asked how much the Master Plan will provide an understanding of all of this to the average reader. Mr. Markiewicz stated even if some new economic development can change the tax ratio from 75% residential/25% business to 70%/30%, it would be helpful to the

community. He noted the Town needs to figure out what will create that change, what can be done to help people stay in town, and how development can be channeled into the appropriate areas. Ms. Madore noted the survey results indicated that most respondents felt new retail and recreation facilities were needed. She stated she also received numerous responses about more sidewalks and sidewalk connectivity. Ms. Cannon noted the character of the development (massing, scale, etc.) will likely matter much more than simply the facades of each building. Ms. Madore indicated there were also some comments requesting a more formal Town Center.

Mr. Markiewicz noted it would be interesting to see what types of businesses responded to the survey. Ms. Madore indicated that many businesses did not seem to be aware of the local Town events and that residents were looking for more business variety. Mr. Follett stated that perhaps the MPUC should be looking at West Acton as an example for what could potentially work in Boxborough. Mr. Fox felt the strip mall at 629 Massachusetts Avenue should be examined to determine why there are so many vacancies at the property. He also noted that some of the items that keep businesses out of town are some of the same items that residents prefer.

Proposed Goals and Strategies

Mr. Follett indicated the MPUC needed to think about what the customer is and understand what the target it intended to be. There was conversation about attracting businesses that lead to community centralization. Mr. Fox noted that Peterborough, New Hampshire might be another location for the MPUC and the Town to look at as an example of development that may work.

The Committee then began to brainstorm ideas on how to guide and concentrate economic development to result in community centralization. Planning and zoning were noted as tools which could be used to encourage village-type retail. The MPUC wanted to promote development which would encourage other types of businesses to co-locate and create a mixture of retail spaces. It was noted there were two main types of people this development would want to attract: 1) the people in town who are already here (those who live in Boxborough) and 2) the people who come to town for work. MPUC members felt that building local capacity was a key component.

Mr. Follett suggested perhaps reaching out to local developers to see what they would do if they had property control, appropriate zoning, public water, and other elements already in place. Mr. Fox agreed and felt they should reach out to local developers. Mr. Markiewicz noted the Committee should be thinking about the Jefferson at Beaver Brook project and how this development is going to fit into the community. Mr. Follett stated young money, commercial land, and highway access are all potential assets for the town. Mr. Clemence pointed out the residents of the Jefferson at Beaver Brook development will need a number of day-to-day services. Ms. Madore indicated she would work on a draft Vision Statement for economic development in the community.

Scheduling of Future Meeting Dates

The MPUC confirmed their May meeting date of Tuesday, May 5, 2015 at 7:00 PM in Town Hall, 29 Middle Road. They also set a June meeting date for Tuesday, June 9, 2015 at 7:00 PM in Town Hall, 29 Middle Road.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:08 PM on a MOTION by Mr. Markiewicz, SECONDED by Mr. Powers, with all members voting in favor.