



MASTER PLAN UPDATE COMMITTEE
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Meeting Minutes
May 5, 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)
Bryon Clemence (Agricultural Commission)
Mitzi Garcia-Weil (Recreation Commission)
Rebecca Morris (Energy Committee)
Al Murphy (Housing Board)
Frank Powers (Council on Aging)

Ex-Officio Members Present:

Dmitry Bykhovsky (Local Business Owner)
Adam Duchesneau (Town Planner)
Kevin Mahoney (Historical Commission)
Maria Neyland (School Committee)
Selina Shaw, Town Administrator

Others in Attendance:

Manisha Bewtra, Metropolitan Area Planning Council
Jennifer Campbell
Jessica Robertson, Metropolitan Area Planning Council

Voting Members Absent:

Marie Cannon (Board of Health)
David Follett (Conservation Commission)

The Chair called the meeting to order at 7:03 PM.

Mr. Markiewicz began by discussing the next steps in the Master Plan Update process. He indicated how much he appreciated the Master Plan Update Committee's (MPUC) enthusiasm in the update process to this point. Mr. Markiewicz noted there may need to be subcommittees which are formed at the end of the Master Plan Update process to work on the various implementation components of the Plan. He reminded the MPUC their role was to look at the bigger picture, the long term vision, and noted the implementation of some items may take a number of years to complete. Mr. Markiewicz referenced the Housing Production Plan the Housing Board had recently completed as an example of a plan which lays out an overall framework for an initiative. He pointed out the Master Plan would not be implemented within 12 months, but instead would need to be worked on over a much longer period of time.

Mr. Clemence felt the MPUC had gone off-script at the end of their last meeting on April 22nd, but as a result, he felt the MPUC now had a very good understanding and sense of direction for economic development. Mr. Markiewicz stated the MPUC should come up with guiding points for various subcommittees to help them implement the Master Plan.

Correspondence

Mr. Duchesneau indicated the MPUC had not received any correspondence since their last meeting.

Transportation

Ms. Robertson gave an overview of the current transportation situation in Boxborough. She wanted the MPUC to think about how the transportation system tied into other elements of the Master Plan. Ms. Robertson noted approximately 13,000 vehicles traverse Route 111 daily between Interstate 495 and the Acton-Boxborough town boundary. She also pointed out the traffic numbers taken at the Interstate 495 on and off ramps has decreased over the last several years. Mr. Clemence asked if it appeared the existing ramp capacities were adequate. Ms. Robertson indicated she could look into this, but the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) does not perform a lot of highway engineering calculations.

Ms. Robertson noted the Commuter Rail fare and parking costs are more expensive at the Littleton Commuter Rail station. Ms. Morris asked who determines the parking rates and Ms. Robertson indicated it depended upon who owned the parking lot. For example, at the Acton Commuter Rail station the parking lot is owned by the Town, but in Littleton the lot is owned by the MBTA.

At this time Ms. Neyland arrived at the meeting.

Ms. Robertson indicated CrossTown Connect is looking to expand the Council on Aging shuttles in the various communities under its umbrella. Ms. Shaw stated the goal of CrossTown Connect is to share transportation resources across the region. Mr. Powers pointed out the Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART) van in Boxborough is restricted to usage by seniors. Ms. Shaw indicated the Town of Boxborough has permission to use the MART van outside of the senior service hours during off-peak hours. She also noted that Acton has a dial-a-ride service and there have been talks about expanding this service to make it more accessible to Boxborough residents. However, Ms. Shaw did indicate there are still a number of issues that need to be worked out.

Ms. Morris asked what was meant by “local shuttle options” in the presentation and Ms. Robertson explained this would include trips to the Commuter Rail station, central locations where people might get picked up, or potentially even a localized shuttle loop. Ms. Morris stated it would be good to have a local transit system as well as a system that connects into the larger regional system. Mr. Murphy asked what transportation options there were to get to the local Commuter Rail stations. After some discussion it was determined that walking, biking, driving, Uber service, and shuttle service were the only means of getting to the stations.

Mr. Markiewicz asked how the major transportation issues can be addressed. Ms. Morris stated she would like to see more information on transportation options for those who are handicapped. Mr. Fox noted there may be a communication problem in terms of relaying the transit options information to those who are seeking it. Mr. Murphy asked if bike trails provided a viable form of transportation and Ms. Robertson stated it depended upon the circumstance. Mr. Powers felt it

was very important the MPUC establish a goal that focused on improving transportation options in town. Mr. Clemence noted there might be trails in town that need parking at their trail heads.

Ms. Robertson then went over the common community destinations of Boxborough residents and where people who work in Boxborough were commuting from. Mr. Markiewicz pointed out one factor was where people could afford to live. He also indicated he was surprised by the number of people commuting from Boston and Cambridge to work in Boxborough. Mr. Markiewicz asked if there was any trend data for these figures and Ms. Robertson stated she could look into this further. Mr. Clemence asked if any companies in the area were providing a reverse commute shuttle and Ms. Shaw noted Juniper and Red Hat in Westford offered this service to their employees. Mr. Murphy asked if it was possible to live in Boxborough without a car and after a little discussion, the group agreed that it was likely not feasible. Mr. Murphy asked, if this was the case, what needed to be done to make it feasible or at least more feasible. Mr. Powers stated that for him, a prime destination would be a town center.

Mr. Markiewicz reiterated Mr. Murphy's question noting the MPUC needed to figure out how to improve transportation options for the residents of Boxborough and the employers in the community. Mr. Bykhovsky noted there is currently a small taxi service in Boxborough and there are other transportation options such as Uber, which is very affordable. He felt the existing transportation services could be researched further and interconnected. Ms. Morris noted Uber is a quality service and is fairly inexpensive. Ms. Campbell indicated another important destination would be locations that would provide options to get to the local Commuter Rail stations. Mr. Markiewicz wondered if there were one or more collection points that would make sense for people. Mr. Clemence indicated he would like to see Boxborough residents be able to acquire parking stickers for the Acton and Littleton Commuter Rail station parking lots.

There was then discussion about what might make up an important destination area and it was determined this would likely include shopping, medical services, or a Commuter Rail station. Mr. Fox felt two important goals were building transportation options for the town and building connections to other local transportation networks. Mr. Markiewicz asked how the Town might be able to make it easier to bring medical professionals to Boxborough in terms of commuting.

At this time Mr. Powers departed from the meeting.

Ms. Robertson asked the MPUC what they felt were some of the other transportation challenges in the community. Ms. Morris noted certain transit stations are not necessarily handicap accessible and the walk to the platforms, even if they are accessible, is too long in some instances. Mr. Markiewicz pointed out that Westford has no access to Commuter Rail service and was curious to know what they were doing in terms of improving transportation options. Mr. Murphy asked if any analysis had been done to see if creating a local shuttle service was feasible from an economic perspective. Ms. Robertson noted this was probably not feasible for a private company, but there are opportunities for a public/private partnership.

Ms. Morris indicated she would like to see a network of charging stations for electric cars. Mr. Clemence asked what Boxborough's position would be on increased MBTA community fees. Mr. Markiewicz stated perhaps the Town needed to improve its communication to residents and

employers about the transportation options they have available to them. Ms. Shaw noted the Town's website has some of this information on its homepage.

Ms. Robertson asked what the MPUC viewed as the future for transportation in Boxborough and how it links to land uses. Ms. Morris expressed a preference for transit options that deemphasized fossil fuels. Mr. Clemence stated he wanted to see a sidewalk along Route 111 from Acton to Harvard. Mr. Murphy indicated the Town should figure out how to harness private transportation options and get these businesses to provide additional transit options. Ms. Garcia-Weil wanted to see bike lanes on various roads in town. Ms. Campbell noted there is no shoulder on Route 111 which makes it very dangerous for both pedestrians and cyclists. Ms. Garcia-Weil noted that in some communities there are bike lanes which are entirely separated from vehicular and pedestrian travel lanes. Ms. Shaw stated she wanted to see transportation options shared across communities. Mr. Markiewicz felt the Town needed to figure out how to improve regional transportation collaboration and cooperation. Ms. Garcia-Weil also thought perhaps pedicabs could be explored as a transportation option, recognizing the fact it might be too difficult to sustain in a community such as Boxborough.

Mr. Clemence asked about the airport in Stow and wondered if people felt it was too big or too small. Mr. Fox noted the airport does provide shuttle service to the Acton Commuter Rail station. Ms. Garcia-Weil pointed out the airport is a regional airport, but some people do not want to see it expanded in any way. Mr. Murphy asked if there used to be a Commuter Rail stop in Boxborough, and Mr. Clemence confirmed there was a flag stop in town at one point in time. Mr. Murphy then asked if, even in the very long term, it would ever be feasible to establish or reestablish a stop in town. Many MPUC members thought this would likely not be feasible and Mr. Markiewicz noted that creating a parking area for the station would be a major issue.

Next Steps

Ms. Bewtra indicated she felt, at this point in the Master Plan Update process, the MPUC could now shift the focus of their meetings to the goals and objectives of the Plan. She noted significant data collection had already occurred and it was time to start pulling together all of this work. Ms. Bewtra then asked the MPUC if they wanted to continue to meet after Fifer's Day where additional data and feedback would be collected from attendees. Mr. Markiewicz and other members of the MPUC indicated they would prefer to continue to meet to discuss the Plan update after Fifer's Day. There was then discussion about how to post various sections of the Master Plan on the Boxborough 2030 website and have them reviewed appropriately.

Future Meeting Dates

The MPUC confirmed their June meeting date of Tuesday, June 9, 2015 at 7:00 PM in Town Hall, 29 Middle Road. After some discussion, Mr. Duchesneau stated he would email the MPUC a Doodle Survey to determine when to hold the July meeting. Mr. Markiewicz also added it would be a good idea if some of the MPUC members could help staff the Master Plan Update booth during Fifer's Day.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:50 PM on a MOTION by Mr. Markiewicz, SECONDED by Mr. Fox, with all members voting in favor.