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Town of North Reading
Massachusetts

Community Planning

MINUTES

Tuesday, September 17, 2019

Mr. Warren Pearce, Chairperson called the Tuesday, September 17, 2019 meeting of the Community Planning Commission to order at 6:45p.m. in Room 14 of the North Reading Town Hall, 235 North Street, North Reading, MA.

MEMBERS

PRESENT:

Warren Pearce, Chairperson
William Bellavance, Vice Chairperson
Ryan Carroll, Clerk
Christopher Hayden
David Rudloff

STAFF

PRESENT:

Danielle McKnight, AICP
Town Planner/Community Planning Administrator
Debra Savarese, Administrative Assistant

OTHERS

PRESENT:

Richard Wallner, Select Board
Carlos Montanez, MAPC

Mr. Pearce informed all present that the meeting is being recorded.

Master Plan Presentation

Mr. Carlos Montanez of MAPC stated that they have been working with the Town since June of 2018, in order to provide assistance and gather community input and ideas to incorporate into the Master Plan. They have held several workshops with the community and Master Plan Advisory Committee, as well as conducting an online survey with good feedback. The current draft Master Plan now has a synthesis of the prior planning studies that were done, they are reflected and sourced in the Master Plan document. They lifted a lot of the key findings and recommendations that were relevant to the Master Plan and then they integrated some of those findings and recommendations in the survey, as well as the workshops to gain more, or new feedback and confirm ideas and try to measure to what degree people were in agreement or disagreement with the ideas. In the appendix you have the January round-table discussion where he gave a power-point presentation that basically included an appendix for the community, documenting the recommendations with either a strong amount of support or a high level of consensus. The vision statement is based on exercises that were done and characterizes all of the visions and goal in the plan: Protecting and celebrating the town's natural areas and open-spaces, improving, enhancing and extending the walking and biking trails in the town, improving the aesthetics of the built-in environment, including Main Street. They highly recommend that the town pursue, in addition to zoning amendments, the development of urban design guidelines, so that the town and the various town bodies can be very upfront to any prospective business owners and investors, to tell them how the town would like to see Main Street look in the next ten years. One way to accomplish this is to be specific enough, but not overly prescriptive in stating how you want the buildings placed, how they look, how you want them to incorporate areas for social gatherings, outdoor seating in front of store shops. They've talked about strengthening community and economic development for the town. What that means is providing more residential choices and certain parts of town.

The Entirety of Rte. 28: In the last economic development strategy they worked on for Rte. 28; subsequently the town had rezoned and created a mixed-use overlay district. They are recommending that that be expanded to cover the entirety of the length of Rte. 28, from North to South. If the town wants to see that corridor transformed they recommend that it have the same type of zoning.

Mass Transit Options:

There is a park & ride lot study and trying to figure out the last mile connection between getting residence in town to commuter rail station outside of town.

Legacy for Future Generations

The goal of a walkable Main Street, transform Rte. 28 into less of an auto oriented thoroughfare and more of a pedestrian friendly Main Street. Consider relocating one of the public facilities, such as Town Hall, to something more prominently located/join Main Street frontage. Also, consider historic center on Park Street, which is disconnected from the retail center along Main Street. A community can have more than one village town square. If there is ever an opportunity of a land swap or purchase along Main Street that could simultaneously relocate town hall or some other public facility and carve out a modest, but useful town square that can benefit from foot traffic and shoppers.

Mr. Rudloff stated that in general there are a lot of recommendations. Are there a top three that should be focused on?

Mr. Montanez stated that along Main Street you have a lot of different town goals that kind of intersect. So, you have ability to accommodate housing options that might not be appropriate in other parts of town. Simultaneously those options can also support leisure retail (i.e. restaurants, boutiques, outdoor seating) bring more jobs and possibly attracting more businesses along Main Street. Make Main Street more walkable and pedestrian friendly with streetscape improvements. Wastewater infrastructure because a lot of the desired or necessary uses require depend on a higher volume of gallons per day for treatment. There is a lot going on and if you implement some of these ideas you will accomplish many of these goals.

Mr. Hayden stated that the biggest hurdle is the infrastructure of the wastewater.

Mr. Montanez stated that if you want to convince people about moving forward on the wastewater decision and they are excited about a walkable shopping village along Main Street this is where you tell them that it's not going to happen without the wastewater treatment capacity.

Mr. Pearce stated that 20 Main Street has created a concept similar to what they are discussing by providing different types of stores that makes it a walkable place where shoppers can get more than one thing done.

Mr. Montanez stated that it would be an accomplishment if the pedestrians are able to shop there and cross Main Street to other areas of the town.

Mr. Carroll arrived at 7:10PM.

Mr. Suresh Rao of the Advisory Group stated that part of the recommendations for Rte. 28 was to make changes to the lanes like Reading and Andover have done to make it a more friendlier and safer for pedestrians. His primary concern is housing and zoning accommodations, but to do this the road and wastewater treatment are needed.

Mike Houle of the Advisory Group stated that in the Master Plan – Recommendation 10.1 talks about transportation. It doesn't really capture the most important point, which is cutting down to three lanes. It gives a choice of roundabouts and t-intersection; you don't know what the other options are, unless you go back through the Master Plan to find them. To him there is only one option – its making it a three lane highway. There is no way that we are going to re-construct the road to change the lanes and then have to rip it up again to put sewers in. We will gain two things by making it a three lane highway. 1) slow down traffic and 2) retail shops, livable spaces, parking spaces which is difficult to do if we don't have the space, three lanes will open this up.

Mr. Pearce stated that the Master plan is a plan to make a plan. It puts out all of these different possibilities, so that if we get to a point that we are getting sewer, we go back and look at the Master Plan. Mass Highway would have to be involved in the changing of Rte. 28.

Mrs. McKnight stated that she met with Mr. Houle today and we looked at that recommendation. The recommendation refers back to the study that we did, but she thinks that it would be worth re-wording it a little bit, so that we talk about the spirit of what that study said to do, not necessarily option A or B. We can certainly refer to that, but she thinks the spirit of that is to slowdown the traffic, make Main Street more walkable and friendly, make it more attractive and function better. As far as pinpointing what the specific design is, Mass. D.O.T. may tell us, what we can and can't do, and we don't know that yet.

Mr. Rich Wallner of the Select Board stated that if you go with the spirit of traffic calming because being a design element that is essential to have a viable downtown.

Mr. Pearce stated that traffic counting measures have been around for a long time and they work. Mass Highway may not be in favor of changing this area of Rte. 28 because it provides relief from traffic on Rte.93, so it's unloading another part of the system. He does believe that a majority of the day would serve that area well with three lanes.

Mr. Rao stated that they are speaking about the same type of three lanes using in Middleton, of which one is a turning lane.

Mr. Houle stated that the Town of North Reading should be saddled with the traffic problems from Rte. 93.

Mr. Hayden stated that he doesn't know if Mass. Highway would worry about off-loading traffic that is going through town. Rte. 93 is what's supposed to carry the main traffic. The traffic on Rte. 28 is supposed to take from town to town, not take it from Andover to Boston.

Mr. Rao stated that if we ask for this, who is going to object to it. The businesses and people of the town want it.

Mr. Bellavance stated this is a lot of conversation for something that we don't even know what Mass. highway is going to say. Ultimately, he likes every option to on the table when it comes to Rte. 28.

Mr. Houle stated that he is objecting to the two choices given for roundabouts and t-intersections.

Mr. Montanez stated that the page before they talk about the 2015 concepts which underwent its own process and he doesn't know why the Cecil Group did not include just three lanes, but they conflated the three lanes with the roundabouts and t-intersections without the three lanes. Traffic calming and all the particulars will come after, because even what the Cecil Group did was concepts and what you need are actual designs by the State because right now the town can't do anything with it. The town needs to seek permission to redesign it, to reach those goals. He will add this to the Master Plan.

Rich Wallner stated that the Cecil Group recommended we take the 12' wide lanes and make them 10'. So, we would still have four lanes, but the smaller width would slow down the vehicles.

Mrs. McKnight stated that she believes the reason is that they didn't want to slow an overall trip from point A to point B, travelling down the Main Street, but what they wanted to do is hit roundabout 1 which would slow it and in the interim of roundabout 1 and 2 you actually had a slower speed, not because the speed was changed, but because of the roundabouts and within that they thought it would be safe to do the middle turn lane because it would be within a slower speed area.

Mr. Wallner stated that the goal was to slow it down and would prevent Andover from bombarding us in the morning, but if we got rid of the stop lights the locals would travel about the same if not faster because it would be a constant flow of traffic.

Mr. Montanez stated that it is easy for him to add some language such as, "or explore other options, independent of these two".

Mr. Houle stated that he would also like to have the three lanes emphasized in the recommendations rather than having to go back to the 2015 study.

Mr. Dan Mills of 5 Greenmeadow Drive stated that he believes that the four-lane cross-section may be required between Lowell Road and Winter Street, just because of the turns that are involved, it's kind of a cross road section, it might be necessary. He agrees that whatever the document references or doesn't reference, it needs to be emphasized that traffic counting relative to a road diet, potentially roundabouts and pedestrian walking needs to be addressed.

Mr. Wallner stated that it's estimated that it will be six to eight years before sewer is brought into the town, with no R.O.I. The RFP has been sent out for the package treatment plant and will also include some designs for this area and the Masters Facility Plan is in place. The hardest part of all of this is informing the public and having them understand it. Obviously we are not going to be able to fund 120 million dollars for sewerage, right away.

Mr. Pearce stated that he doesn't see any reason why they couldn't fund it. The town has to step up to it, of course, but the town isn't necessarily going to pay for it. The town per say is not going to pay for it, the users of the system are going to pay for it because ultimately what happens is that it money will come from a revolving fund and when the commission is set up and all of the users of the system pay their bills, it pays the SRF back, so the town has to have some investment in it and part of their investment is going to be whatever infrastructure is going to be the town facilities, just like any other business or person that's on it is going to pay their fair share of the hook-up to the facilities and after that its user fees.

Mr. Hayden stated that the longer we wait the more it's going to cost.

Mr. Rao asked if there is going to be another project for Rte. 28.

Mr. Pearce stated that the sewer is going to be the time to go to the State for help.

Mr. Rao stated that we should still have a skeletal plan ready to go.

Mr. Bellavance stated that there is a lot of overlap from the different meetings that some of us attend and we are able to inform these other groups of these discussions.

Mr. Montanez stated that it could take several years to get an approval for a roadway plan.

Mr. Pearce asked if how long is the roadway approval good for.

Mr. Montanez stated that he does not know.

Mr. Mills stated that D.O.T. has a pretty thorough process. They have a "Project Needs" form so, you just fill out the form, at a low cost, identifying the level of need and potential funding. The State contributes toward it, if they see a need for it. It's a step by step process and he would encourage the town to start the process as soon as possible. The town might be in a ten year window for sewer, the funding the design, approvals, right-of-way and utilities takes years to accumulate.

Mr. Pearce stated that it's a well-defined road that could be improved. It's a good basis to start with.

Mr. Houle wanted to know if the town would have to take on any responsibility for the roadway.

Mr. Pearce stated no, it's a State road. We're trying to provide transportation to public transportation. Getting people to park their car and take public transportation would unload Rte. 28 which would provide back-up to change the lanes from four to three.

Mrs. McKnight stated that they are also looking at the option to take an express bus from North Reading to Boston, recommended by a recent MAPC study.

Mr. Bellavance stated that they did a "Complete Streets" study, basically looking at sidewalks, crosswalks and bike lanes.

Mr. Houle asked if putting utilities underground is feasible when the construction of the road is being done.

Mr. Pearce stated that they did ½ mile of utilities in the roadway near Stop & Shop which later started sinking. They found that it would be too expensive to try to keep the utilities underground, so they put them overhead.

Mr. Wallner asked if the CPC is going to have the Facilities Master Plan committee come forward with their findings and advocating. Also, the sewerage study should be coming in. These are the CPC studies and advocating the plan. What is the best position for the CPC to be in?

Mr. Bellavance stated that they are not going to do anything for six to eight months.

Mr. Pearce stated that the first step is to get the Master Plan and review it and pick a couple of projects to see if we can move them along. One project will actually enhance another project. We can then bring it to town meeting.

Mr. Hayden stated that there is not enough time to bring it to the October Town Meeting.

Mrs. McKnight reviewed the general contents of the other Master Plan chapters and asked if there was commentary on any of the other subjects. There was discussion about the executive summary graphic map.

Mr. Hayden stated that the "Martin's Pond" wording should be eliminated from the map.

Mr. Wallner stated that there are too many objectives. It should be broken up into two or three slides. There is no key to tell what the multi-colors are for.

Mrs. McKnight said there were concerns about how to best highlight areas of town considered for affordable housing and new zoning of smaller lots. The Plan recommends certain areas near Main Street are considered along with Martins Pond and some other areas, but Mrs. McKnight has received comment that residents are concerned about calling out specific neighborhoods. Perhaps the whole residentially zoned part of town should be under consideration rather than certain neighborhoods.

Mr. Bellavance asked if a couple of renditions could be made for them to review.

Mr. Jeff Gannon of 3 Linwood Avenue stated that he is interested in the Concord Street area which was not talked about, but in the report it was discouraged from any other development besides industrial business. Is there anymore thought into this? He thinks it's a good area for mixed use because it's close to Rte. 93.

Mr. Hayden stated that is the only area in town with zoning for Industrial Office.

Mr. Pearce stated that commercial properties are what the town needs and they are trying to hold onto these areas and if they put sewer in they may be able to get some multi-story buildings.

Mr. Gannon stated that in the plan there was a note about the Rte. 28 traditional architectural design. Referring to the design of the storage building at 35 Main Street – Is this the design that the town wants to see happen?

Mr. Hayden stated that the renderings the applicant brought in were far worse than the actual outcome. For the type of use for this building this was the best the planning board could ask for.

Mr. Pearce stated that they do have four different overlay design criteria's for Rte. 28.

Mr. Montanez stated that he would make the changes to the Master Plan as requested this evening and also provide some alternative versions of the summary map for review.

Dogwood Lane Subdivision – Bond Release

Mr. Carroll moved, seconded by Mr. Bellavance and voted 5-0:

that the Community Planning Commission vote to accept the September 10, 2019 report from Design Consultants, Inc. and that the remaining amount of \$5,000.00 be released for the Dogwood Lane Subdivision, pending receipt of outstanding balance of \$250.00.

Minutes

Mr. Carroll moved, seconded by Mr. Hayden and voted 5-0:

that the Community Planning Commission vote to approve the minutes of July 30, 2019 as written.

Mr. Carroll moved, seconded by Mr. Hayden and voted 5-0:

that the Community Planning Commission vote to approve the minutes of August 20, 2019 as written.

Adjournment at 9:45PM

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ryan Carroll', is written over a horizontal line.

Ryan Carroll, Clerk