



TOWN OF NORTHBOROUGH Master Plan Implementation Committee

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Master Plan Implementation Committee & Select Board Joint Meeting January 18, 2024 Zoom Meeting Minutes Approved February 15, 2024 as Amended

Chairman's Introduction to Remote Meeting—Mr. Leif, Chair, opened the remote meeting. Mr. Leif stated that this Open Meeting of the Master Plan Implementation Committee was conducted remotely pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023, An Act Relative to Extending Certain COVID-19 Measures Adopted During the State of Emergency, signed into law on March 29, 2023. All members of the Master Plan Implementation Committee were allowed and encouraged to participate remotely. The Order allows the MPIC to meet entirely remotely so long as reasonable public access is afforded so that the public can follow along with the deliberations of the meeting and ensuring public access does not ensure public participation unless such participation is required by law. This meeting did allow for Public Comment. The public had access to view the meeting via the link on the posted agenda. A recording of the meeting is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aaRTHcLa8Ts>.

MPIC Members Present, remotely: Rick Leif, Chair; Julianne Hirsh, Vice Chair; Amy Poretsky, Millie Milton, John Campbell, Fran Bakstran, Gene Kennedy, Tracey Cammarano.

Select Board Members Present, remotely: Mitch Cohen, Chair; Kristen Wixted, Lisa Maselli, Laura Ziton, Julianne Hirsh.

Others Present, remotely: Laurie Connors, Planning Director; Tim McNerney, Town Administrator; Johnathan Law, Weston & Sampson; Russell Archambault, RKG Associates; Eric Martin, 32 Wesson Terrace; John Rapa, 105 Wesson Terrace; John Bourgeois, 52 Washburn Street; Peter Sepe, 190 Howard Street; Mike Tietjen, 30 Auger Avenue.

The meeting started at 7:00pm.

Presentation of Downtown Revitalization Plan to Select Board

Mr. Leif explained that the MPIC was established by the Select Board to implement recommendations made in the master plan. The top goal desired by residents was for improvements to be made to the downtown. Weston & Sampson was hired to create that plan.

Mr. Leif stated they need to determine what type and density of housing might be accommodated downtown. He said it's been shown that other downtowns have experienced success with restaurants and shops on ground floors and multi-family dwellings above, and since the plan recommends a certain amount of residential development in the downtown, current zoning should be reviewed. Additionally, design standards will need to be modified so that the development community has a clear idea of what Northborough feels is acceptable; many people have expressed a desire for a 'classic New England' feel in the downtown, but what that means needs to be clarified.

Mr. Leif added that the plan recommends adding an economic development position that in the short term would become the Downtown Revitalization manager, and in the longer term, would look at economic development across the entire town.

Mr. Law spoke next and summarized the public/stakeholder engagement process. He went over some of the questions asked in the survey and responses. Mr. Archambault discussed some of the stakeholder feedback.

Mr. Law explained that the information gathered from the public engagement process was analyzed along with the data from the online survey which helped them develop the three scenarios ultimately proposed. The different scenarios and their potentials were discussed, and renderings of those scenarios were shared.

Next, Mr. Archambault discussed plans for implementation strategies and shared short-term objectives that could be started within the next three years to improve the aesthetics of the downtown through public and private actions. The presentation concluded.

Ms. Ziton noted that parallel parking on South Street and Main Street was discussed during the presentation and asked if that meant changing traffic lanes. Mr. Law said no; if land in that area became available, an edge would be taken from the existing street and offset that by 8' to create those spaces.

Eric Martin, 32 Wesson Terrace, asked if there was a way to communicate with MassDOT regarding the timing of the traffic lights on Route 20. Mr. Law said the Town could have discussions with MassDOT regarding a possible fix.

John Rapa, 105 Wesson Terrace, wished to follow up on Ms. Ziton's comment regarding parallel parking. He asked if creating those parking spots would require taking land from residents at those locations. Mr. Law said yes, under this current design, but that is open for discussion. Mr. Archambault said the plan was laid out to set the vision for a given block and to talk about the potential for that to happen, but there was never any discussion regarding taking people's property. Mr. Leif agreed; there was never discussion that the town would go in and start to take land, it was always going to be a collaborative effort between the town and the owners.

Ms. Wixted appreciated the thought given to electric car charging opportunities and thought it would draw people to spend time at shops and restaurants Downtown while waiting for their vehicles to charge.

John Bourgeois, 52 Washburn Street, asked if there was thought given to enhancing the fire station project as it relates to road beautification. Mr. Leif said that would be a question for the Planning Board during the permitting process.

Peter Sepe, 190 Howard Street, asked, with regard to the four gas stations within two blocks downtown, if it was possible to rezone that area and add mixed-use buildings. Ms. Connors said zoning was rewritten around 2009 with an emphasis on mixed-use downtown, but since there hasn't been significant revitalization, a lot of the historic uses of gas stations and service stations are still present and that other zoning changes would need to be done to realize the vision put forth in the plan.

Discussion of Next Steps – Concept for a Phase 1 Streetscape Project

Ms. Connors presented her proposal for a streetscape project on Blake Street, which included the Blake Street and Pierce Street rights-of-way, the pocket park at the intersection of Blake Street and Route 20, the municipal parking lots on Blake Street and Pierce Street, as well as some private parking areas, provided those property owners were interested in participating. Existing conditions were shared, and Ms. Connors identified areas in the public realm where improvements were needed. Ideas for improvements were proposed. Ms. Connors shared some photos portraying Millbury's downtown revitalization efforts from the time when she was that town's Planning Director. Project benefits, such as benefits to economic development, public safety, climate change, stormwater management, and aesthetics, were discussed.

Ms. Connors said, based on her experience with the Millbury project, design costs were anticipated to be roughly \$250,000 (more if the private property owners participated), and approximately \$2.5M for construction costs. Potential sources of funding discussed included grants and funds from the town through municipal appropriation, CPA funds, ARPA funds, Chapter 90 program, and in-kind services.

The project schedule was discussed, which was proposed to begin in Winter/Spring of this year with the securing of funding for design and community outreach activities, procurement of an engineering consultant, and creation of a focus group. The next phase would begin in Summer, with the undertaking of the project design, beginning community outreach, submittal of grant applications, and securing municipal funding for construction costs; this was anticipated to take a year. The next step, during Winter 2025-26, would be to procure a construction contractor, with construction anticipated to begin in Spring 2026, depending on funding.

Mr. McInerney said he'd sent a synopsis to the board in which one of his recommendations was to secure an economic development coordinator to help retain and attract businesses throughout Town, with the downtown being the focus. He felt this project could be a model that could be used as a catalyst and replicate it throughout, if they like the design, implementation, and cost. He commended Ms. Connors for her efforts.

Ms. Hirsh recommended that the MPIC and/or the Select Board try to accelerate the Town Hall Feasibility Committee's determination of how to best utilize 4 West Main Street. She asked if consideration had been given to burying the utilities in the Blake Street area. Ms. Connors said that could be done if it was a major priority, but that it was unlikely that \$250,000 would be sufficient to do the design, and it may add another million to the construction costs. Ms. Hirsh thought it was worth looking into. She next asked if a thorough study would be done regarding the flow of traffic on Blake Street and asked about the possibility of a solar carport in that area. Ms. Connors said there would have to be decision made whether an aesthetically pleasing parking lot was desired or an eco-friendly parking lot. Mr. McInerney suggested considering putting the conduit on the ground at a lower cost for a future connection but added that reconnecting the private property services would be very expensive and difficult to coordinate.

Mike Tietjen, 30 Auger Avenue, asked about existing parking spaces and if that would change with the proposed changes. Ms. Connors discussed the various parking areas. Mr. Tietjen asked if the railroad tracks could be screened with vegetation or fencing. Ms. Connors said there could be opportunities to do so with shrubbery, fencing would be expensive.

Ms. Maselli asked about a sidewalk going over the railroad tracks. Ms. Connors said she could find out what the limitations are. Ms. Maselli suggested signage could be placed to direct people to the existing municipal car park, and perhaps stripe parking where it is currently unstriped.

Mr. Cohen expressed his concerns regarding the proposed flow of traffic on Blake Street. Ms. Connors agreed and said she was interested in hiring a multi-discipline engineering firm which would include a traffic engineer to study that one-way configuration. Mr. Cohen next asked if the Applefest street fair would be able to continue in the Blake Street area. Ms. Connors said yes.

There were no other questions or comments.

Ms. Bakstran made a motion for the MPIC to adjourn the meeting; Ms. Hirsh seconded the motion. Roll call vote followed, all were in favor.

Ms. Hirsh made a motion for the Select Board to adjourn; Ms. Wixted seconded. Roll call vote followed, all were in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 9:13pm.

Respectfully Submitted by
Michelle Cilley, Board Secretary