



# TOWN OF NORTHBOROUGH

Master Plan Implementation Committee  
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**Master Plan Implementation Committee Meeting  
December 21, 2023  
Zoom Meeting Minutes  
Approved March 21, 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 not 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>.

**Members Present, remotely:** Rick Leif, Chair; Julianne Hirsh, Vice Chair; Amy Poretsky, Millie Milton, Ashley Davies, John Campbell, Fran Bakstran, Gene Kennedy, Jen Tolman, Tracey Cammarano, Jeanne Cahill.

**Others Present, remotely:** Laurie Connors, Planning Director.

The meeting started at 7:00pm.

**Finalize the Executive Summary, Discuss Committee Priorities & Schedule the Final Presentation**—A draft of the Executive Summary had been sent to members for review. Additional changes were suggested. Discussion followed. Additional grammatical or formatting changes were requested to be tracked in the text and sent to Ms. Connors by Wednesday.

Next discussed were top short-term priorities as submitted by MPIC members, which included: improve the aesthetics of the downtown through public and private actions; develop and implement a multi-year, multiphase effort to improve public infrastructure in the downtown including streetscaping; consideration of hiring a staff person to implement changes arising out of the Downtown Revitalization plan; zoning; reuse of the Town Hall.

Mr. Kennedy felt creation of a downtown management organization should be linked with the hiring of an economic development manager. The Select Board will be tasked with making the decision regarding hiring new staff, but such a committee/organization could be implemented quickly. Mr. Leif said that because work falls back on the staff person who is the liaison to each committee, an Economic Development coordinator or downtown manager would be needed to make significant progress; there isn't the staff capacity for that now, and without staff support, it won't be effective.

January 18<sup>th</sup> was tentatively scheduled as the date to present the plan to the Select Board.

**Discuss Phase I Streetscape Design Concept**—Ms. Connors discussed an MVP (Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness) grant due in June, which she suggested as a source of funding for design of a Blake Street streetscape project. This grant was a significant source of funding for Millbury's downtown revitalization. Ms. Connors shared street views of Millbury's Phase I and Phase II downtown revitalization projects which depicted various design elements. She next shared a street view of Blake Street and noted the improvements made to the streetscape during MassDOT's construction of Route 20. Ms. Connors suggested making Blake Street one way throughout its entire length and noted improvements that could be made with similar design elements as those implemented in the Millbury project, such as street tree plantings, seating walls, decorative pavers, rain gardens, and more. She noted one benefit of the MVP grant is the possibility to use grant money to design and make physical improvements to private properties. She was interested in approaching some Blake Street property owners to see if they would be open to having their parking lots reconfigured; the excess pavement could be removed and replaced with landscaping. Ms. Connors asked for feedback.

Ms. Milton supported the suggested improvements and asked if those were dependent on whether traffic was one-way or two-way. Ms. Connors said yes to some of the improvements, the town only has jurisdiction over the public right of way, which includes the sidewalks, the municipal parking lot, and the pocket park.

Ms. Cahill asked if, regarding the MVP grant, there was any particularly identified vulnerability in that area. Ms. Connors said that the significant amount of low-income housing owned by the Housing Authority in the downtown, the use of the food pantry and the various activities that the churches undertake, would be helpful in the application. The focus would be the same as in Millbury, to concentrate on infiltrating storm water; greening of the space and reducing the impervious surfaces; putting in as many rain gardens as possible, maybe adding porous pavers.

Ms. Hirsh had concerns regarding one-way traffic entering Blake Street from Route 20 and suggested having a traffic study done. She asked how rain gardens work; Ms. Connors explained the process. Discussion turned to Blake Street and flow of traffic.

Ms. Hirsh asked if Ms. Connors intended to propose improvements to Blake Street as their first project, she felt residents were hoping for improvements to the intersections in the center. Ms. Connors said it would be a while before the grant funds were dispersed, so the project wouldn't be completed for about three years.

Mr. Campbell suggested that when this presentation is made to the Select Board, that it would be effective if Ms. Connors included some of the improvements made in Millbury.

Ms. Poretsky asked what the cost would be for an engineering plan of Blake Street. Ms. Connors estimated \$100,000 and then mentioned that the pocket park could cost a little more so maybe \$100,000-\$150,000. Ms. Poretsky suggested asking for \$100K to be appropriated at Town Meeting to start the process sooner. She asked if MVP could be used for construction even if they didn't use them for the design. Ms. Connor stated that it could be done that way. Discussion followed. Money appropriated through Town Meeting may save a year, however, funds would not be available until July 1<sup>st</sup>.

Mr. Leif said the role of the MPIC was to bring the plan forward to the Select Board. They can provide suggestions for infrastructure improvement and beautification, but he wasn't sure if at that time, they should request funding for the engineering and design to be placed on the Town Meeting warrant. Mr. Campbell thought it couldn't hurt to pose a hypothetical question. Ms. Poretsky suggested the use of ARPA money. Mr. Leif said that he, Ms. Hirsh, and Ms. Connors will connect to discuss how to proceed based on feedback received from this committee.

Ms. Tolman suggested the use of college interns for the design work and that local landscapers might like an opportunity to fix up some spots and advertise their business. Ms. Connors said there could be opportunities for students and landscapers to adopt a piece of land to clean it up, but the engineering itself is complicated and requires a professional engineering firm.

Mr. Leif said that this committee needs to keep thinking of what their role will be as they head into 2024, they are charged with implementing the Master Plan. Mr. Campbell agreed and said he hoped this committee kept the role of sponsoring ideas, they are focused on the Downtown right now, but everything else overlaps with the efforts they are making now.

Ms. Connors said while implementing Millbury's downtown revitalization, she'd recruited a focus group which included staff, business owners, residents, and members of the community such as the librarian, DPW Director, Fire Chief, among others; when the design work is underway for Northborough, MPIC members can choose whether to be involved.

Ms. Milton thanked Ms. Connors for her efforts. Ms. Poretsky appreciated the photos shared of Millbury's revitalization efforts; they helped her visualize the possibilities better than the images shared by the consultants. Ms. Connors will share photos of the completed project at presentation before the Select Board.

Mr. Leif said he is on a committee at the New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill that reviews municipal and private projects that do a good job of horticulture, greening, water management, etc., and that they'd awarded Millbury a Community Greening Award; he hoped that was something they could try to do with Northborough.

**Review of the 12/14 Joint Meeting with the Fire Station Building Committee, Design Review Committee & MPIC**—Mr. Leif said it seemed as though the architects were in agreement that the new fire station must fit in nicely and maintain a traditional historical feel. The Chief is mainly concerned about functionality of the building but understood the concern for the design. Ms. Hirsh appreciated Mr. Leif's efforts in making sure the architects understood that importance of the revitalization efforts. She hoped the material used for the retaining wall would complement the building. Ms. Poretsky was concerned about future expansion on that site, the elevations and slopes were steeper than anticipated. She'd contacted the Chief asking for consideration of the Harvey property instead, but the Chief said they were too far ahead in the process.

#### **Old/New Business**

- **Minutes from November 16<sup>th</sup>**—Ms. Poretsky made a motion to approve the amended minutes. Ms. Milton seconded the motion. Roll call vote followed, all were in favor.
- **Next MPIC Meeting**—January 18<sup>th</sup>.

There was no other business. Ms. Poretsky made a motion to adjourn, Ms. Hirsh seconded. Roll call vote followed, all were in favor. Meeting adjourned at 9:05pm.

Respectfully Submitted by  
Michelle Cilley, Board Secretary