



TOWN OF NORTHBOROUGH

Master Plan Implementation Committee
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**Master Plan Implementation Committee
February 15, 2024
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=UZ976PO-41U>

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

Others Present, remotely: Laurie Connors, Planning Director; Terry Underwood, Northborough Cultural Council

The meeting began at 7:00pm.

Presentation from the Northborough Cultural Council

Ms. Underwood provided background about the Northborough Cultural Council. The council currently has six members. Funds received from the state are used for grants; \$8,000 was received in funding last year, and nearly \$7,000 has been received this year. The Cultural Council works with Community Affairs on the Summer Concert Series. Events organized by the council include CultureFest and the temporary exhibit 'Go Out Doors'. The mural next to the Town Common was part of a public art campaign sponsored by the Cultural Council.

Plans for future events were shared. The Council is currently seeking funding for Love Northborough Sculpture, installation of Apple Sculptures, and a free-standing mural.

Ms. Davies asked if there were any next steps or deliverables that the Cultural Council is looking for from the MPIC. Ms. Tolman, also a member of the Cultural Council, said they are trying to build Northborough as a destination for the arts and bring a brand identity to the town aside from Applefest. Ms. Connors suggested that a permanent installation like the 'Go Outdoors' exhibit would provide artistic screening of the railroad tracks, as part of the Blake Street streetscape project. Ms. Underwood agreed.

Mr. Leif said the Committee is looking forward to seeing how they can collaborate in the future. Mr. Leif asked Ms. Connors to keep this partnership in mind when considering future beautification projects.

Update on Phase I Downtown Revitalization Project (Blake/Pierce Streets)

Ms. Connors provided a follow-up to the January 22nd Select Board meeting at which it was unanimously agreed to allocate \$250K of ARPA funding for the design of the Phase 1 Downtown Streetscape project. She will be establishing a Phase 1 Focus Group.

Mr. Leif reminded members that the Blake Street project is a combination of that street and the intersection with Pierce Street and providing connectivity down Pierce Street to the municipal parking lot. Ms. Connors noted the number one priority on the Complete Streets Prioritization Plan was Pierce Street.

At this time, Ms. Connors briefly exited the meeting due to technical issues.

Ms. Davies suggested representation from the MPIC on the focus group; this committee has been closely involved with the planning and ideas that came out of the Downtown Revitalization plan.

Ms. Poretsky suggested representation from someone on the Select Board, since more funding will be sought for future phases and it would be key to keep the Select Board up to date; a Planning Board member could also be considered since there will be discussions regarding zoning.

Ms. Hirsh suggested that the focus group could benefit from input from the Historic District Commission.

Ms. Davies exited the meeting. Ms. Connors returned to the meeting.

Mr. Leif told Ms. Connors that while she was away, there was discussion about the makeup of the committee and suggestions for representation from other boards. Ms. Connors was interested in reaching out to certain members of the MPIC as well as other boards and committees but would speak with the Town Administrator first as she believed he would be the appointing authority.

Mr. Campbell felt a traffic study would be instrumental in determining the flow of traffic on Blake Street. Ms. Connors said it's worth studying to see if there is a better alternative than what currently exists.

Ms. Hirsh said it's been mentioned that the Ellsworth tree (Blake Street area) is not thriving. She asked if a soil analysis would be done there, since that is the area proposed for a pocket park. Ms. Connors' plan was to keep all the trees there, but the Tree Warden mentioned that tree was starting to decline, so it may be time for a change. When a design firm is retained, a landscape architect will be part of the team, and suggestions will be made for improvement.

Ms. Poretsky said at the last meeting, Ms. Connors said the design cost would be \$100K, and now she is saying it's \$250K; does that include the traffic study?

Ms. Connors said the design cost has always been estimated at \$250K and that maybe she'd misunderstood Ms. Poretsky's question at the last meeting to be related to the design of the pocket park. She explained that design costs are typically 10% of the construction costs, and that she is considering adding storm water drainage where currently none exists. The design team will include a traffic engineer who will provide feedback on traffic circulation.

Ms. Poretsky asked if the decision would be made on [the reuse] of 4 West Main Street before Ms. Connors goes out to bid for the design phase. Ms. Connors said chances are likely that decision will be made well before the design is finalized; the plan will be similar regardless of that building's reuse.

Discussion of Next Steps – MPIC Role in Downtown Revitalization Efforts

Mr. Leif asked Mr. Connors to provide an update regarding the proposed zoning changes to be reviewed at the Planning Board's public hearing the following week; some of those zoning changes will impact the Downtown area. As Chair of the MPIC, Mr. Leif wanted to make a statement at the public hearing regarding where the MPIC stands on those zoning changes.

Ms. Connors shared a PowerPoint presentation titled [Proposed Zoning Amendments Planning Board Public Hearing](#).

Ms. Connors explained the proposed MBTA zoning bylaw. She next described the two subdistricts that are being considered for this new MBTA overlay district; the Southwest Connector Subdistrict and the Downtown Subdistrict. Ms. Connors has been advocating for the inclusion of land in this area not only because the Downtown Revitalization plan report recommended more density in the Downtown but also because grant money tends to follow the MBTA mandate; she explained a grant program just unveiled that would pay for infrastructure improvements such as streetscape programs, with the average award around \$2.5M.

RKG is currently doing an affordability analysis of the two subdistricts to determine if it will be affordable for developers to include a greater percentage above and beyond the 10% for affordable housing.

Ms. Poretsky said the Planning Board was in favor of slow growth and noted many of the Master Plan survey comments were not in favor of additional housing. She also mentioned that if a developer with a good project came forward in the future they could always be added to the overlay. Ms. Milton said another concern was the traffic that would be generated on Hudson Street and Route 20 as a result. Mr. Kennedy agreed with Ms. Poretsky's comment about taking it slowly but said that the state bylaw provides an opportunity for people in communities that want to support additional housing.

Ms. Poretsky was concerned about the impact on the schools and municipal services caused by additional school-aged children in added housing. She noted that Avalon paid \$ 1.4m in taxes and has 170 school-aged children. Previously she was told that each school age child costs approximately \$20,000 in taxes so if you multiply \$20,000 by 170 the schooling costs are \$3.4M, leaving to a \$2M tax deficit that the residents have to cover. There are seniors that have stated they would like to retire in place and she was concerned about taxes. Ms. Connors said school enrollment has decreased significantly in the last eight years and referenced a report which said

between the 2004/2005—2023/2024 school years, enrollment decreased by 422 students or 133%.

Mr. Leif said that at the Planning Board's public hearing, he planned to say that the MPIC is supportive of the rezoning plan of the Downtown area because it's consistent with the possible development of additional multi-family housing near the downtown which is consistent with getting more people living near it and using the downtown facilities planned for development.

Ms. Davies said she felt there was general support from the MPIC but that they want to ensure that the Harvey parcel is used in the way that the Downtown Revitalization Plan recommended.

Mr. Leif next asked Ms. Connors to explain the proposed zoning changes regarding groundwater that also have an impact on the ability to redevelop the downtown.

Ms. Connors explained that the amendment addresses a major impediment to downtown revitalization efforts identified in the 2023 Downtown Revitalization Plan Report; it makes all commercial uses that do not use or result in toxic & hazardous wastes, two family dwellings, & multi-family dwellings by-right uses in Area 3 of the Overlay District; new construction/significant additions must adhere to same performance requirements as if they were special permit uses; and eliminates mandatory increase in minimum lot size to 20,000 sq ft when lots are served by public sewer; lots served by private sewerage disposal facilities (i.e. septic systems, cess pools) must still adhere to 20,000 sq ft minimum lot size requirement. This change will impact up to 58 lots in Northborough Center by making them conforming lots. Essentially this bylaw makes Northborough more business friendly and makes revitalization efforts easier.

Mr. Leif said, at the Planning Board's public hearing, he would speak on behalf of the MPIC in favor of this change to the zoning, as it will encourage revitalization of the downtown over time.

Ms. Connor next spoke about the proposed sign bylaw. The Planning Board was unsuccessful two years ago to pass a sign bylaw at Town Meeting, so the Planning Board has been working with Design Review to bring something forward this year. The bylaw allows a greater variety of commercial signs than are currently permitted, provides definitions for a variety of signs, and sets design standards for those signs. The DRC will review sign permits for the Downtown Business district and provide feedback to the Building Inspector; there would be no fee and no change to the turnaround time.

Old/New Business

Minutes from December 21, 2023—Ms. Poretsky suggested changes to the December minutes that were sent to the committee in advance of the meeting. Ms. Connors wished to clarify that the construction cost was always thought to be in the \$200-\$250K range as specified in her PowerPoint presentation; she believed her response was in response to a targeted question. Discussion followed. Mr. Leif suggested that Ms. Connors and Ms. Poretsky discuss this offline and come up with wording that is acceptable to both, and the minutes will be brought back for review at the next meeting.

Minutes from January 18, 2024—Mr. Leif noted an error in the first paragraph. There were no other changes. Ms. Hirsh made a motion to approve the minutes as amended from January 18. Ms. Poretsky seconded the motion. Roll call vote followed, all were in favor.

Upcoming OARS event – February 23, 2024 at 1:30 pm—Mr. Leif mentioned there will be information at this meeting regarding the river and what impact that may have on the MPIC’s plans for the Harvey property. Discussion will be held at the next MPIC meeting.

There was no other business to discuss. Ms. Poretsky made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Bakstran seconded. Roll call vote followed, all were in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 9:32pm.

Respectfully Submitted by
Michelle Cilley, Board Secretary