

Master Plan Implementation Committee

Minutes of Tuesday, March 30, 2010 Special Meeting

Meeting called to order by Chairman/Planning Board member, Ed Forsberg, at 6:30 pm, in the Planning Board Office, Room 212, Town Hall.

Committee Members Present: Ed Forsberg, Mike Berry, Dick Nottebart, Dick Power, Patrick Shield. Committee members Al Goetz and Roger Turner arrived at 6:45 pm.

Staff Present: Don Johnson

The meeting had been called specifically to discuss the following two business items in time for those items to be placed on the agenda for the Board of Selectmen's meeting scheduled for April 6, 2010.

- 1) **Requests of the MPIC regarding ownership and future uses of Norfolk County land on the easterly side of North Street:** Ed motioned, seconded by Dick P., to send a letter to the Board of Selectmen to request that the Board send a letter to the Town's four state legislators requesting that they make provisions for the Town of Walpole to have the rights to the land at the northeasterly side of North Street that is presently owned by Norfolk County. Motion carried 5-0-0 (Al and Roger were not present for this vote).
- 2) **Reinvestigation of the Downtown Municipal Campus concept as put forth in the Master Plan and future plans for municipal buildings:** Ed had compiled a list of excerpts from the Master Plan that he brought forth for discussion, specifically:
 - [A notation of the section of Chapter IX, Community Facilities, with the heading "Town Buildings and Facilities", which begins on page 157.]
 - The purpose of the Master Plan Vision Statement is to crystallize a description of the Town's future in 20 years that can serve as a goal during implementation of the Master Plan. Walpole's Vision Statement focuses on strengthening the Town's natural and cultural resources network, encouraging more business development, managing residential growth while working towards attaining the state's 10% goal for affordable housing, and improving circulation and transportation choice. (See page 1 for the Walpole Vision Statement.)
[Vision Statement, page iii]
 - ***Revitalize Walpole Center into a "smart growth" center with apartments or office space above shops, a new civic center for municipal facilities, improved streetscape and parking, and a new Town Green.*** Downtown Walpole has many assets: a commuter rail station, several viable "Main Street" style blocks, land for parking, civic land uses that anchor the downtown district, public assets that can be leveraged to make improvements, and underutilized properties that could be redeveloped. A new campus of public buildings with a Town Green and public investments such as streetscape improvements can combine with new zoning and financing incentives to attract more private

investment. Apartments over ground floor retail uses encourage more variety in goods and services by providing more customers. Because apartments have fewer bedrooms and therefore fewer schoolchildren, they are likely to create a net tax benefit to the Town.

Recommendations:

- Establish a Downtown Opportunity Overlay District with design guidelines for all new development and redevelopment.
- Plan for a municipal facilities campus or civic center for public safety departments, town offices, the library, a new senior center, a new Town Green, and a parking deck.
- Designate the Center for District Improvement Financing to fund public realm improvements such as streetscape amenities and new parking options.

[Key Actions to Meet the Challenges and Achieve the Vision, page v]

- ***Protect natural and cultural resources in a Green Network and a Heritage Network.***

Environmental resources are interrelated systems. Protecting and restoring the integrity of Walpole's natural resources focused on the Town's rich river, stream and wetland systems in a Green Network will also provide robust opportunities for nature based recreation. Walpole has many historic buildings, sites and landscapes that are known to some residents but need much more widespread acknowledgment and recognition. They too can form a Heritage Network that tells the story of the town. Marked pedestrian and bicycle routes linking natural, historic and scenic destinations can create greater awareness of these town-wide and regional systems.

Recommendations:

- Identify private lands near wells and Zone II areas for purchase or management outreach.
- Extend greenways along the Neponset River, Mine Brook and School Meadow Brook with trails and canoe access where feasible.
- Inventory historic buildings and landscapes and explore official recognition and protection options such as a historic landmarks bylaw.

[Key Actions to Meet the Challenges and Achieve the Vision, page vi]

- ***Invest in people and new processes in town government.*** Walpole's goals for the future require more refined tools and techniques to manage development. Volunteer boards and commissions will need more staff assistance to evaluate projects; to work with residents, businesses, and state departments; and to pursue technical assistance and funding for Town projects. Although new development requirements may demand a higher standard, they should also communicate clearly what the Town wants. If businesses and developers understand what the Town is looking for, they will be more likely to provide it early in the permitting process. This is equally true for housing and business. New processes and procedures to coordinate and streamline the permitting process for projects that meet Town goals are essential to attracting more investment to Walpole. Finally, as part of the recently approved I-495/95 South Regional Technology Economic Target Area, the Town now has access to economic development tools like tax increment financing (TIF) to help attract new investment. The Town must designate and pursue

state certification of the Economic Opportunity Areas, such as brownfields sites, that can benefit from this tool. Another kind of TIF is available through District Improvement Financing area designation. Walpole needs to take advantage of all the economic development techniques available to it.

Recommendations:

- Hire planning and economic development staff to assist boards and commissions in applying new standards, coordinating land use, housing and economic development strategies, and pursuing funding for Town projects.
- Streamline the permitting process for development projects that meet Town goals.
- Explore tax increment financing options for purposes such as redevelopment of brownfields, upgrading industrial park infrastructure, and providing a parking deck in the town center

[Key Actions to Meet the Challenges and Achieve the Vision, page vi]

It was noted at this point that three municipal buildings are needed: police, fire, and senior center.

- ***Stewardship of the Master Plan***

The everyday demands of town government and turnover in town staff and officials can sometimes make it difficult to seek guidance from a Master Plan in daily decision making. Effective implementation of a master plan requires stewardship – someone has to feel responsible for monitoring progress and bringing changes to the attention of the community. An Implementation Committee must be appointed to take on that role. The Committee will work with town staff and officials to develop a more refined set of priorities and a detailed schedule of implementation actions. In addition, the Committee should report annually to the Planning Board, Board of Selectmen and Town Meeting on the progress of implementation, discussing unforeseen opportunities and barriers and changing conditions. Every five years, public meetings should be organized to review and modify the principles and priorities of the Master Plan, so that it remains a useful guide for town decision making.

[Key Actions to Meet the Challenges and Achieve the Vision, page vii]

- ***Municipal Walpole*** -- Thanks to efficient management and increased commercial tax revenue, the Town has new or upgraded town facilities for the public safety departments, the Library, the senior center, and a community center. The Town offers a wide range of high quality community services that are accessible to all residents. *[Vision for 2024, page 3]*
 - Plan ahead for municipal facilities in a downtown civic center as an anchor for downtown revitalization *[Goals, Community Facilities, page 6]*

There was discussion at this point by Al about modifications to the senior center and Blackburn Hall and by Ed about a possible addition to the present Police Station. Dick P. said the idea of this process of siting municipal buildings should bring the vision back into a town-wide look at

the whole thing; it isn't just about plunking down a building on dirt; look at fields too; look at the whole thing. Ed said to focus on the process recommended in the Master Plan for siting municipal buildings; once the process is down, then we can get into individual sites for buildings.

Roger noted that Spring Brook (which is on the Town Hall lot) is being cleaned, but there is still a 200' riverfront protection zone along either side of the brook that can't be built upon. He suggested that this 200' zone should be enhanced as a riverfront park. He noted that in the original municipal campus concept little attention had been given to the history of flooding; in 1955 much of the downtown had been flooded, and the Allen Pond Dam was constructed thereafter primarily as a flood control mechanism for this reason. He noted that on older maps the areas along Spring Brook and that now encompass much of Blackburn Field were called "Center Swamp", and have been filled. So we have to be careful with use of these sites and building there.

- A strong majority also agrees that the Town needs to attract new business to enhance the tax base, focusing on existing business zones, such as Route 1, Route 1A and the Town Center, rather than expanding the area zoned for business development; *and*
- Walpole residents think most town services and facilities are good, but there is room for improvement. *[Master Plan Survey Results, Findings, page 10]*
- Many respondents believe town officials often work at cross-purposes to one another and that town government could be managed more smoothly and effectively. *(The elected and appointed committees don't work in unison on some items such as economic development, land use planning etc. - from a business person who has a business in the Town Center and also lives in Central Walpole, in town for 20 or more years, aged 65 or over, and with no children at home) [Master Plan Survey Results, The Best and the Worst, The Worst, Town Government, Pages 15 - 16]*
- On a four-point scale, where 4 is Excellent and 1 is Poor, the facilities and services scored as follows: (Land use planning: 1.6) *[Master Plan Survey Results, Rating Community Facilities and Services, Pages 17 - 18]*
- Plan ahead for municipal facilities in a downtown civic center as an anchor for downtown revitalization; *and*
- Include planning for town facilities in the Town's Capital Improvement Program. *[Chapter IX, Community Facilities, Goals, page 153]*
- A number of town facilities located in Walpole Center are not adequate for their uses and/or do not meet requirements such as Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) access, including the Police Department, the Fire Department, Town Offices, the Library, and the Senior Center; *and*
- The Old Town Hall building, which is one of only two buildings in Walpole listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places and now serves as the Police Department,

has roof leaks, water damage, other repair and rehabilitation needs, and it does not comply with ADA requirements. *[Chapter IX, Community Facilities, A. Current Conditions, Key Findings, page 153]*

- The municipal facilities plan will likely have to be implemented in phases, but it should not be simply a building by building plan. *[Chapter IX, Community Facilities, A. Current Conditions, Town Buildings and Facilities, page 158]*
- **Plan ahead for municipal facilities in a downtown civic center as an anchor for downtown revitalization and include facilities planning in the Town's Capital Improvement Program**
 - **Consider alternative sites and combinations of uses, such as the following:**
 - Consolidate municipal uses on the present Town Hall site along the east side of the Stone Street frontage.
 - Restore and use Old Town Hall and the land all along Stone Street from Main Street to School Street.
 - Sell Old Town Hall or offer a long-term ground lease for adaptive reuse and restoration as offices or condominiums. Do the same with the other smaller parcels where the fire department is now located, so that these sites could be used for mixed uses.
 - Build a mixed use library with affordable apartments or office space (perhaps town offices) above and sell the existing library for mixed income apartments or for office space.
 - Create a combined senior center and senior housing complex by renovating and enlarging the present Town Hall.
 - Relocate Stone Field to create a Town Green linked by pedestrian pathways to Main Street and to Memorial Park.
 - Build a parking structure to serve downtown employees, customers, overflow resident parking, or possible train station parking.

[Chapter IX, Community Facilities, B. Recommendations, page 163]

Discussion was resumed. Dick P. suggested the need to re-purpose old buildings (old library, old town hall (present police station)) once replaced. There was then discussion on a letter that would be sent to the Board of Selectmen. Dick N. thought the letter should not recommend any particular site or building at this point. Dick P. and Mike B. thought the emphasis at this point should be to get the process of municipal building location back on track as suggested in the Master Plan. (Roger left the meeting at this point, at 7:45 pm.) There was further discussion about sending out the letter in terms of the hearing on the Robbins Road Police Station location that the Board of Selectmen was expected to have at their meeting on April 6. There was then further discussion about just wanting to present the process of siting the future municipal buildings in terms of the recommendations of the Master Plan. Ed motioned, seconded by Dick P., to send a letter to the Board of Selectmen for the agenda of their April 6 meeting, which would suggest that the town use the comprehensive process of siting the future municipal buildings in terms of the recommendations of the Master Plan. Motion carried 6-0-0. Tomorrow

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(March 30), Don would draft the letter and send it out for review by the MPIC members, and comments would be compiled into the final draft of the letter that would be sent to the Board of Selectmen on Thursday morning (April 1) in time for their April 6, 2010 meeting agenda. Some of the MPIC members would be in attendance at that meeting.

Adjournment: At 8:15 pm, Ed motioned, seconded by Dick N., to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried, 6-0-0.

Respectfully Submitted,