

Town of Brookline Planning Committee Minutes
Saturday December 2, 2023 at 8:30 AM
At Town Office

Present:

Committee Members in Person: Barbara Bourne (BB) Temporary Chair,
Somara Zwick (SZ), and Stanley Noga, Jr. (SN)

Committee Members via Zoom: Leah Daly

In Person Members of the public: Michael DeSocio

BB called the meeting to order at 8:43 AM.

BB, at this meeting is serving as temporary Committee Chairperson and SN is temporarily serving as Committee Secretary.

BB asked if there were any changes to the Agenda. Stan requested that at either today's meeting or one in the future, the Planning Committee consider the matter of the town plan containing a North Village and a South Village in the municipality of Brookline.

BB directed attention to the minutes of the last meeting for accuracy and completeness. No committee attendees were of the opinion that any change was needed. BB made motion to approve the minutes as submitted. Seconded by SN. All in favor. Unanimously approved.

BB and SZ presented a previous Planning Committee questionnaire converted by Oliver Ames to Microsoft Word from Google Drive format. It was received in the past 24 hours via email. SZ suggested reviewing it in detail when Oliver is able to attend our committee meeting. Oliver will be using the questionnaire and converting it to Qualtrics software which enables both digital and paper formats. BB and SZ spoke to sending a refined questionnaire to Brookline citizens via FPF, town Listserv and possibly post cards seeking additional considerations for a questionnaire before the upcoming town meeting. MD expressed preference for use of

digital means versus mailings. SZ expressed privacy of email addresses and legal requirements regarding such. SN questioned money source for postage costs. SZ stated that those costs would come out of "Supplies" in the town's budget.

BB advised that the current Town Plan was adopted in 2018. It is valid for 8 years before it must be renewed which translates to a deadline of 2026. SZ stated that the committee should contact Oliver Ames to determine any time constraints which may affect a revision time frame with citizen input. LD sent text message during this conversation to OA for time deadline advice. Committee will await OA input and coordinate timelines.

SZ attended a Planning Committee in Newfane attended by some local towns to include Newfane, Brookline, Townshend and Windham. Attendees referenced the fact that segments of towns' populations view town boundaries based upon functionality as opposed to legal jurisdictions. Attendees expressed the potential benefits of municipalities sharing ideas, equipment, facilities, employees, housing, development, etc. Regard to 'Open Meeting Laws', existing channels of communication, cooperation and other aspects of municipal governing were discussed. Attendees felt optimistic about continuing such meetings in the future due to the potential benefits which towns could gain.

SZ referenced the MTAP program which Brookline is participating in via the Windham Regional Planning Commission and the fact that that process would benefit by participation of this Planning Committee.

SZ and BB discussed methods of reaching citizens in the committee's quest to solicit input to the Planning Questionnaire. Seeking answers to questions such as, 'which method of social media are you learning about what is happening in town?' If a citizen does not use a particular method of the several available, why not and what do they use. MD suggested a path of the committee selecting an approach and bringing the citizens focus to using that particular process/method.

SN asked if this would be a time in the meeting to discuss “village centers”. No objections noted. SN stated that areas currently noted as “North Village” and “South Village” do not, in his opinion, resemble “villages”. His view is taken upon reflection of geographic characteristics, housing locations, apparent population, etc. Based upon discussion to include various considerations relative to population, grant availability, etc., it is unknown why those designations exist for those two locations. SZ wondered if having a “Village” location in a town might enable applying for grants which otherwise might not be available via WRC. SN and BB volunteered to contact WRC. Given current committee members overall workload, BB will contact WRC to seek knowledge as to why “villages” are on the Brookline planning map.

SZ suggested, for planning type purposes, review of properties which may have either transferred to “Land Trust Type” ownership or have “land use restrictions”. SN suggested the process on both the local and state level whereby that information may be obtained. He explained that such information is typically available via local Lister and/or town clerk as well as town land records. There are state agencies which maintain data regarding such properties which created Conservation Easements, etc. SN offered to share land transfer information which he investigated over the past three years, if the Planning Committee wished to do so.

Discussion of community trends and indicators which may provide guidance in the creation of our town plan occurred. It included: a) school enrollment, b) zoning, c) asset conversion via lot subdivision relative to changing financial needs of property owners, d) Brookline’s present image as a residency destination and its effect on future land use, e) conservation, f) current commercial uses and their influence on future property use and, g) other influences. Perhaps WRC will have information which can be shared with Brookline.

SZ provided a summary Energy Report. The lack of energy assessors has slowed the assessment phase by the state. Based upon what a building's assessment reveals, grants may be available to make energy improvements. This would be Phase II of the Act 172 process.

SZ advised of existence of a Community Solar Site Committee. It is taking input from communities to formulate a plan of goals and implementation. Kim Freedman of Newfane is a person who was involved in the solar program at the NewBrook School and has information as to how it works as regards financial and green energy benefits.

MD asked if the Town Plan entailed security and safety of residents and property as well as the community's perception of crime. SZ and SN provided a summary of Sheriff, State Police experiences and programs. They shared advice of those entities for adequate lighting and cameras.

It was suggested that a brief questionnaire be ready before this committee's next meeting so that it could be reviewed prior to the next meeting. SZ mentioned sending an email to listserv right after the holidays seeking citizen suggestions and questions. She also mentioned contacting OA as to modifications to said questionnaire.

Next meeting will be Saturday January 6, 2024 at 8:30 AM at the Town Office.

Meeting Adjourned at 9:47 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Stanley Noga, Jr

Temporary Secretary

