

**Town of Brookline Planning Committee
Minutes**

Saturday April 6 2024, at 9:30 AM
At Town Office

Committee Members Present:

In Person: Barbara Bourne (BB) Stanley Noga, Jr.(SN), Charlie Ezequelle (CE), Leah Daly (LD)

Via Zoom: Temporary Chair Oliver Ames (OA), Donald Woodford (DW)

Members of the Public: None

The meeting was called to order at 9:32 AM.

OA called for changes to the agenda and there were none. OA made a motion to approve the minutes of the last meeting of this committee. The motion was seconded by SN. All present members voted to approve the minutes.

OA called for any changes to the agenda and there were none.

Status Updates on the Plan

Windham Regional Commission Representative

SN noted that due to staffing changes at Windham Regional Commission (WRC), Matt Bachler will be our primary contact for the Plan and not Margot Ghia.

Village and Town Center Designations

OA introduced the topic of Village Center Designations within the Town Plan. SN provided clarity on the areas of current designation, which are broadly defined as:

- *North Village* near the intersection of Whitney Hill Road and Grassy Brook Road
- *Village Center* in the area from the Meeting House through Town Office
- *South Village*, which encompasses the area near the "T" intersection at Grassy Brook Road and Putney Mountain Road

SN read from the email provided by Matt Bachler, WRC, and the commission discussed the purpose of the designations and related benefits. The designation indicates areas where the town believes there is potential for additional development and/or greater density due to existing topography and other factors. The *Center* is typically the area with the greatest concentration of

services and/or where any additional services for residents should be located. SN noted that it is unlikely the town would receive or currently needs additional services.

LD asked whether there is a financial benefit to the village designations. SN noted that it facilitates future-use planning with the State of Vermont, including application for certain grants and tax credits to support revitalization efforts. Specifically, it provides prioritization for certain grants and credits under certain conditions.

SN, CE, and BB noted that these villages had been identified as far back as the 2005 Town Plan. Stan read text of the letter from Matt Bachler describing the villages.

SN commented on the villages noting some concerns with the current designations. The North Village designation currently includes a lot of swamp land, streams and a cemetery and it is sloped. It does not seem appropriate for additional development. The South Village is steeply sloped, and Grassy Brook runs close to the road. The field between Harris Hill Rd and the stream and perhaps one other field appear to be the only flat and developable areas.

BB agreed on the points raised on the North Village noting lots of flooding down through the valley and past Parker Rd. She noted the old designations may not represent how the areas have changed with flooding and climate changes.

CE reviewed page 59 and others in the prior plan noting that the designations were for general planning purposes and reflective of ideas of the time. The Center should remain where it is as that area could expand if there were a need.

SN and other members discussed that development in the north end of town would be cost prohibitive and there isn't much needed or likely to move into the Village Center at this time. There continues to be interest in assisted living and affordable housing and designations do create opportunities for that kind of development as well as where projects like Community Solar could be sited.

BB noted that she and other town residents may prefer to keep the agricultural nature of the town intact rather than increasing development in existing fields. BB noted a small village had been proposed for the town years ago near Sunny Lane that would have created additional denser housing but preserved agricultural lands; however, the project was not completed. It is clear there is a tremendous need for housing.

OA noted that residents and the town could pursue formal conservation, and that putting areas into conservation would achieve this result.

BB and CE said that any designations in the town plan are an endorsement. OA noted that the consensus of the committee is that Brookline should not designate villages.

Town Plan Survey

DW presented some details on how the Commission could expand the survey to an online version to increase the response rate. The members discussed that the limited response rate was a concern but noted some surveys had not been turned in yet. Members discussed the challenges with an online survey in light of town demographics and the preference for many town members for paper surveys. There was discussion of the costs of an online survey and the response rate to the last survey, which was somewhat similar albeit a bit greater.

OA mentioned that we do need to move to digital distribution, but we may not be in a place to do that this cycle. We also need to keep progressing on the Plan and any additional responses are likely to be incremental.

DW noted that the question of villages was not on the survey and asked whether it should be.

CE noted that an emailed survey was likely to be regarded as a scam, but that mailing was cost prohibitive for the number of responses. In the future it would be better to align surveying to return of tax payment or something similar that was more likely to get a response.

BB asked that the minutes reflect that the Commission will discuss town centers and villages in the next

There was discussion of when the Plan is due given new information that we may be past due. CE confirmed that in that case we can readopt the past plan so one is in force and then continue work. LD reviewed the WRC website, which notes the Plan does not expire until 2026. The confusion likely resulted from the fact that plans were five years in duration and expanded to eight.

The Commission discussed and agreed to post the survey on the town website. LD will ask the Town Clerk to post and share link detail with the Commission. DW will share it with Facebook and Town Listserv. The goal is to post and receive surveys by April 19.

WRC Participation in Planning Process and Cost

SN presented the options for full and partial support and facilitation from WRC. SN is also on MTAP committee and noted some changes in grant application deadlines. In last week the State adjusted the grant, which can cover planning costs. The timeline advanced from June to April 30th. WRC suggested not applying for engineering or planning grants as it is unlikely to be funded. SN noted the Town will support up the WRC's partial support of the planning process with funds up to \$3,000.

Timeline

BB suggested and the Commission agreed to do personal outreach to community members to complete the survey. BB noted that Tommy Brooks offered to take a look and be point person on fire/emergency with respect to the Plan. BB to reach out to Tommy and others to get input related to fire/emergency and schools.

LD will convert to the former Plan to MS Word and start to add comments as a basis for rebuilding the new Plan. All members should review the Plan and start to add comments. LD will manage edits.

Other business

OA needs to step down from the Planning Commission due to additional job responsibilities but will stay very engaged on hazard mitigation topics.

Next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for May 11, 2024, at 8:30a

The meeting was adjourned at 10:54 AM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Leah Daly

Secretary