

**Town of Brookline Planning Committee
Minutes**

Saturday June 1 2024, at 8:30 AM
At Town Office

Committee Members Present:

In Person: Stanley Noga, Jr.(SN), Mike DeSocio (MD), Leah Daly (LD), Donald Woodford (DW)

Via Zoom: Temporary Chair Leah Daly (LD)

Members of the Public: None

The meeting was called to order at 9:32 AM by acting Chair, Leah Daly.

The Commission briefly discussed attendance and meeting timing. SN noted BB may be unable to attend due to family matters. Charlie Ezequelle (CE) is also largely unable to attend due other obligations. DW to discuss commission attendance or participation with Somara Zwick (SZ).

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

There were no members of the public wishing to present to the Commission.

Review/discuss designation of Town Villages and Town Center

SN explained the benefits of town village and town center designation. MD asked for clarification on certain benefits, which were explained, noting there is no negative consequence to the Town for designations. SN referenced clarification provided by Matt Bachler, Senior Planner, Windham Regional Commission via email to the Town.

SN noted there will be two public meetings required in this process.

The Commission discussed whether a recommendation to the Select Board was needed to change the current designations in the Town Plan. SN noted the Commission's decision should be recorded by formal vote and motioned to remove the designations for the North and South Villages on the current map, leaving only the primary village center. LD seconded and all members voted to approve the recommendation to the Select Board.

The Commission discussed possible usage of the parcel at the ballpark and recycling area, which are owned by the Town. There was discussion of possible areas of development including

the stretch of land along Grassy Brook behind the church and the Town-owned daycare center. DW noted the flat area near the former South village at the “T” near the bridge as one of the few flat areas that could be possible for development.

The Commission discussed the history of the Town owning the daycare center, including stipulations in Vermont statute relating to Town ownership of property for rent.

Review Town Survey Results

DW confirmed there were 42 responses to the Town Planning Survey and provided an overview of the results, which are available here: [Town Planning Survey Summary](#). Respondents ranged in age but skewed older and were almost exclusively individuals with a primary residence in Brookline.

The Commission discussed the somewhat limited response. DW noted that primary distribution at the Town Meeting likely impacted responses even though it was also distributed via digital forums including the town listserv and Front Porch Forum. This may have made it difficult for second home owners and renters to participate.

LD noted that the Town should be able to access demographic data to update that Plan that indicates the percentage of primary, secondary, mobile, rental, and other homes. DW plans to review this information. SN noted that Helen Holt, Lister, or Alyssa Schmidt, Lister, could support finding this information.

DW continued to summarize survey results noting Brookline is viewed as a bedroom community and environmentally friendly place. The Commission discussed responses that supported some additional regulation related to nuisance properties as well as seemingly countervailing responses calling for less regulation. Members of the Commission noted it would be difficult to reduce regulation given low levels with SN noting that concerns raised on development related to Act 250 require a review of the Town Plan to ensure proposals are consistent with the Plan.

DW noted that comments pertaining to regulation were less about regulation specifically and more about not concentrating businesses.

SN noted there were updates or amendments to Act 250 that cleared the Legislature and were sent to the Governor this legislative session. Act 250 is the primary tool to review development. MD noted that respondents want bedroom community and are interested in more regulation to limit sprawl. If there is no regulation then anything is possible. Some respondents seem to be looking to protect the character of the current Town, which can be difficult to do without forms of zoning.

Per survey responses, key town priorities include:

- Hazard and flood mitigation
- Preservation of landmarks with no consensus on how that should be paid for

LD noted that key topics all relate to preserving the town as it is. DW observed that despite aging demographics, there is minimal interest in aging services.

Some commenters noted lack of regulation contributes to nuisance properties. SN noted that Maggie Foley, MTAP, noted nuisance properties are difficult to address via Town Plans and are often not included; however, there is a material sentiment in survey responses related to these types of properties. SN noted there can be very little Towns can do to address such properties, and courts typically direct towns and residents to come to agreements as pursuit of cases typically leads to dead ends for towns. MD noted that people want to buy properties and improvements typically occur through natural turnover of properties. While it takes time, these issues often resolve through market-driven property turnover. SN noted that properties may convey to heirs or be contested, which can further delay any resolution.

MD observed that we can consider or correlate protection of landmarks to opportunities to improve services.

DW raised the issue of the old school building noting many towns sell their schools or municipal buildings when no longer in use. SN noted that generally towns are not landlords and should not own property for commercial purposes. This has been discussed at the Select Board. The town nets approximately \$20,000 per year in rent. Information was discussed for background purposes with MD and SN noting that any material discussions of town property are reserved for the Select Board.

MD asked a series of questions related to the overall tax burden for the town, the percent of budget dedicated to highways and the commitment for schools. The Commission discussed the overall tax revenue for the town and the challenges related to demographics and the need to raise revenue.

MD noted the importance of the volunteer infrastructure in town to support key priorities including flood mitigation and the meetinghouse building. This volunteer support is consistent with town plan priorities. He suggested that a lot of time and focus is needed for each flood recovery and the Town needs to transition to a mitigation or adaptation mindset. After flood mitigation the meetinghouse is the next largest priority. Which feels consistent with areas of focus. Lots of time on flood recovery and need to move into a mitigation mindset, followed by social/meeting house.

DW noted that the meetinghouse can continue to be explored as a tool of civic engagement.

SN, MD and LD discussed the administrative burden for a small town. SN noted that the Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) is helpful but they decide if the Town is in compliance with requirements, which is needed to purchase their insurance. There is a lot of bureaucracy, for example the need for a flood plain administrator, which takes a tremendous amount of time and energy for a volunteer board in a small town.

MD provided some additional background related to VLCT, including the need to discuss contracts and potential contracts and litigation in order to proceed with design work on the meetinghouse. There is no paid resource to do this.

Confirm status of MTAP Grant

SN will be meeting with the Windham Regional Commission (WRC) shortly to discuss the MTAP grant. If received, he will provide coordination. Decisions on \$20,000 in grant award due May 31 are pending and should be answered shortly. This would fund support for the planning process.

Review next steps in plan development and timelines

Within the Town Plan we should anticipate flood map updates next year in the fall. FEMA has created recommended maps. SN will share these with the Commission, including proposed changes. These are not publicly available online.

LD noted she would review the plan and provide comments or highlight areas for update, pending detail on whether Brookline would have grant funding to support the planning process.

SN noted the Plan is sent to all towns that border Brookline, and he could circulate plans we have received for review.

DW noted there is also a regional plan. Windham's plan is semi-regional and fits within the broader state plan. The Commission discussed the need to understand and, to some extent, align with bordering plans to more holistically address cross-border issues like hazard mitigation. MD noted how important this is for issues like flood that are neither created nor can be completely addressed in one town and require coordination across many.

The Commission agreed to discuss and share knowledge on our plan in conjunction with other towns' plans at the next meeting.

Other Business

There was none.

Next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for July 11, 2024, at 6:00pm. LD volunteers to be acting chair again.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:43 AM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Leah Daly, Secretary