

**Town of Brookline Planning Commission
Minutes**

Tuesday, September 9, 2025, at 6:00 PM
At Town Office and via Zoom

Committee Members Present:

In Person: Mike DeSocio (MD); Stanley Noga, Jr., (SN)

Via Zoom: N/A

Members of the Public: Matt Bachler, Senior Planner. Windham Regional Commission · Director of Planning & Economic Development

The meeting was called to order at 6:06 PM by Stanley Noga, who noted the meeting was being recorded.

SN confirmed no changes were requested to the agenda.

The Commission discussed the minutes from the previous meeting. MD suggested the Commission table approval of minutes until the next meeting given lack of quorum.

SN introduced Matt Bachler (MB).

MB noted the Town Plan needs to be revisited every 8 years and now reapproved in March 2026. The Town first has to think about how well the current plan is working. Brookline does not need to do significant updates to it if it is working. It does not need to be started from scratch. It should be an opportunity to adjust with changes in the last years, such as demographics, community facilities, flood impacts and community priorities.

MB referred to the detailed email he had shared with SN and which SN had shared with the group. He noted there are a number of provisions to cover in the planning process.

1. Data updates

The community profile is important to update. This includes demographics and housing detail. Any changes in community facilities and road should be included as background.

The Town will typically meet with town officials and other committees to address the Plan.

SN noted there were few committees. MD noted it would be important to connect with the Meeting House Committee. There is also a Cemetery Committee and Audit Committee. SN discussed some additional town businesses.

MB noted he has sent the updated community data. That is part of WRC's core services. WRC could support the town by adding this data and related narrative to the new plan.

MD noted additional support is available from the Town Clerk with respect to data. MD noted he would prefer the Commission review, rather than draft, the initial report.

MB noted that towns take different approaches to updating plans. Some do all of the preliminary work, but those planning commissions may be more fully resourced.

MB reminded the Commission they need to schedule at least 60 days for governance and approval of the Plan. Planning Commission has to hold a hearing and provide 30-days notice and the Select Board must wait 30 days, so if the Plan was drafted by January 1, the Planning Commission could hold a public hearing February 1st, and then the Select Board could not hold a hearing until March 1st.

He noted the main repercussions of having an expired Plan would include not being able to adjust zoning, though Brookline does not have zoning, and if there was an Act 250 permit in town there could be some challenges.

If the Plan is just a bit late it would be ok. It is likely there is not so much in the Plan that needs to be updated but the Commission has to do its due diligence.

MB noted it is helpful to have Select Board or Road Agent or Highway Commissioner review the plan at a high-level and provide feedback. That is easier for the Town to do versus WRC.

2. Recommendations from WRC on the last town plan

MB noted the second item is to consider the recommendations from the Regional Planning Commission during the last town plan review process.

MB noted the Plan met all requirements in 2018. All Windham towns with Town Plans do get approval from WRC, though it is optional. In that process WRC confirms all required elements of the local plans are included. This ensures the local plan is compatible with the regional plan. WRC also makes recommendations. Recommendations following the last plan, included:

- Strengthening some of the policy language. Using "shall" instead of "should". This is useful in Act 250 issues.
- Strengthening the implementation plan. However, MB noted this is challenging in a small town.

MD asked what Brookline needs to do with the recommendations and MB noted that we only need to consider them.

MD discussed some of the past approaches to policy review at the Select Board and suggested there may be implementation planning or guidelines in the prior plan.

3. Engaging the community

MB noted the third item is to engage in community outreach and involvement in updating the plan and he noted he was aware of the recent survey. If the Commission is comfortable with the survey that could suffice for community engagement.

He also suggested the Commission could hold a public meeting to review survey findings and solicit additional feedback. The public hearing also provides an opportunity to solicit feedback.

MD noted that a major message in the survey was to not have the town change. However, there were different views on the benefit of rules to preserve the character of the town. This can be a volatile issue in many towns, especially as it relates to zoning.

MB noted that this can be a heated conversation so it may be useful to postpone until after the town plan. Guilford did a presentation on why basic zoning could support the town separately from their planning process to begin to build a case. The Commission and MB discussed some of the issues surrounding zoning.

SN noted that recreation was also a topic in the survey.

MB said that if the town ever considered zoning it would be important to capture the basics in the town plan. While it is not zoning in the Plan, the pre-work is in the plan and can provide a basis for future work.

MD might suggest that the survey is sufficient. MB noted that WRC could review and summarize the survey. That could be a role for WRC.

4. Consistency with statewide plan goals

MB noted the BPC needs to ensure the plan is consistent with statewide plan goals and contains all elements. The 2018 Plan met all requirements. MD noted that cataloging any gaps between 2018 and current plan requirements would be a helpful service in light of changed requirements.

5. Ensuring internal consistency

MB noted that monitoring for internal consistency among plan elements, goals, objectives, and community standards can also take some time and is a requirement. Are any goals in conflict with where the community is today?

MD noted that specifically this would involve two elements. First, requiring for internal consistency and second, is anything no longer consistent with the town. The Planning Commission is needed for the second part. MD noted that any material inconsistency in the 2018 plan would likely have been caught in that review.

MB noted that a lot of where language has changed in the past few years has been flood resilience and housing. Other towns have also expressed interest in access to newer kinds of recreation.

The Commission discussed flooding and noted that the updated Hazard Mitigation Plan can provide key content for the Town Plan.

SN noted that several of the pending changes from the state regarding flood resiliency will also have impacts.

MB noted it is common to include Hazard Mitigation detail in Town Plans, including cutting and pasting key content.

6. Address compatibility with regional plan

MB noted that addressing compatibility with the regional plan and approved plans of adjoining municipalities is an area WRC can support. This takes a small amount of work from WRC.

7. Set schedule to implement plan

MB noted the next recommendation was to establish a schedule to implement the plan. There are recommendations at the end of each chapter. At the end of the document there are also some main strategies. MD noted that is an area WRC could also support. There may be items to remove or add.

SN asked about what tactical tools WRC suggests using. MB noted that towns typically work in Word documents. We can give MB access to the folder and he will make redline edits. He can share it back to the Commission prior to the next meeting.

He noted he felt Google documents were harder to work with.

MD noted that this was helpful and asked to confirm roles and responsibilities between the Commission and WRC. MD noted the following roles:

1. Data and engagement
 - Address and updating data (WRC)
 - Connecting with town officials (BPC, WRC)
 - Town plan maps updates (WRC)
2. MD noted there was not much to cover. MB agreed.
3. Engage the community. BPC had conducted a survey and planned to rely on it. WRC could review it. (BPC, WRC)
4. Plan consistency with statewide goals (WRC)
5. Internal consistency among plan elements.
 - WRC already reviewed the last plan for consistency so the focus will be on ensuring updated remain consistent
 - BPC would need to monitor for this and this would be a key function

- Taking hazard mitigation plan and adding it to the Town Plan (WRC). MB and Commission noted that Margot Ghia of WRC worked on the Hazard Mitigation Plan.
6. Address compatibility with regional plan (WRC)
 7. Establish implementation plan (support from WRC)

MB noted that Brookline does not necessarily seem to be looking for a very detailed, extensive implementation process and the Commission generally agreed.

MD noted the main tasks for the BPC include scheduling the session with the highway commissioner, the highway supervisor, the Select Board, and WRC. Then it will be critical to carefully review the plan for consistency, which feels like an appropriate use of Commission time and capability.

SN asked to set a more specific schedule. The Commission can move to more frequent meetings.

MB provided his thoughts on the timing of the process. He noted the following items should happen earlier in the process as they can impact the full plan:

- WRC to review data and update the narrative.
- Reviewing and summarizing the survey
- Reviewing alignment to state planning goals.

The following activities are in the middle of the process:

- Updating and redlining the document
- Bringing in detail from the Hazard Mitigation Plan

The activities below can be at the end of the process:

- Review town maps
- Review other town plans

The first meeting in October should include having data and WRC review completed. This group should schedule a work session between now and then as well. The Commission is open to scheduling additional meetings, as needed.

MB noted the goal should be to have a draft done December 31st. This would entail MB or WRC providing redlines in October. The first October meeting would include a review of community data and survey. Then in October the BPC would review the Town plan, to read through the goals and policies, and see what may need to be updated. In November, any suggested changes to policy or other aspects of the Plan would be incorporated.

MB will take a look at the numbers. The blended rate for time is \$100 and he expects this to be 30 to 40 hours of work or \$3,000 to \$4,000.

MB suggested if it went higher it would not be much higher and will put detail into a spreadsheet soon, along with a clear scope of work for the Select Board to review. It can then do a simple contract.

MB noted it might be useful to meet at a different cadence.

MD noted the Leah Daly can share the word version.

The group discussed some of the challenges with formatting. MB will send more materials shortly.

MD noted we have no quorum. SN noted the next meeting is September 23.

MD asked whether we should add meeting for the Commission now. The Commission discussed meeting October 14 and 28.

MB suggested the BPC use September 23rd meeting to review the Plan and provide high level comments.

MD suggested scheduling our meetings around MB's deliverable dates.

MD and SN noted that the focus MB provided has been helpful for the committee.

SN offered to provide the meeting transcription to MB.

MD and SN agreed the Commission should read the full plan with an eye toward any items that no longer fit.

Hearing no other business, SN adjourned the meeting at 7:17pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Leah Daly, Secretary