

DRAFT
OUTREACH STEERING COMMITTEE MINUTES

2009 March 11

7:30 PM

Location: Room 2004, Acton Town Hall

Present: Sue Benson, Mary Ann Ashton, Dick Calandrella, Susan Mitchell-Hardt, Ryan Bettez, Bob Whittlesey, Planner's Collaborative reps (Jim Purdy, Joe Brevard, Daphne Politis, Brian Barber), Town Staff: Roland Bartl and Kristin Alexander, Ann Sussman, Brandy Brandon, Xuan Kong, Lauren Rosenzweig, Kathy Acerbo-Bachman, Terra Friedrichs, Linda Chance, Jim Snyder-Grant, Nancy Lenichek, Jamie Watt, Robena Reid. (Full members, Associates, and visitors are all listed here)

Meeting came to order. Kathy Acerbo-Bachman, vice-chair, acting as chair.

Quorum check: Jim Snyder-Grant appointed temporarily from associate to full for meeting (and agreed to take minutes).

Roland Bartl reviewed the history of the process:

[Ann Sussman, chair, arrived and chaired the rest of the meeting.]

Comprehensive Community Plan process re-launched in 2007 at State of The Town Meeting. Phase I chartered by Selectmen to bring in a planning firm to conduct broad and comprehensive outreach, to be as inclusive as possible. Process itself was intended to build communication & community.

Board of Selectmen created an outreach steering committee, to make sure the purpose of the outreach was achieved, and to ensure openness, and to make sure final report reflected this openness.

We had the outreach process in 2008, a draft report has gone back & forth, and now we have a 3rd draft to look at.

Tonight's goal: find out if we can we reach closure. We can if we can compromise on a few points and come to a vote.

Joe Brevard from Planner's Collaborative:

Planner's Collaborative brings objectivity and experience. This document is an important element, but only a beginning. The complete Master Plan is a document to help guide future decisions. A chance to look ahead & anticipate both goals & problems & methods to minimize problems and reach towards goals as effectively as possible. A set of specific recommendations. In the future, the town will likely choose to diverge from this initial vision, but the hope is that a well-done plan & a well-executed plan will allow the town to make a CONSCIOUS choice to diverge.

Jim Purdy from Planner's Collaborative.:

Went through phases - we are completing phase 1, visioning, goals & objectives. Phase 2 has state-mandated components. Starting with lots of data collection. Vision helps focus the data gathering. In each component, there are alternatives to specify. Then, it's the next time for citizen input - review alternatives & then a committee and the town chooses them. But phase 1, we need to make sure we have a general view of which way the town wants to go. Phase 2 - We start asking - can it be done? (financially, legally, technically, politically).

When alternatives are chosen, then we choose how to get there.

Daphne Politis, Planner's Collaborative:

Thanks for working on this. Process has been long & complex & sometimes hard. Happy with results. Structure of what's coming up in this meeting: go over comments & discuss disposition of comments. Daphne will be proposing disposition of comments & we will vote.

And we may identify some issues or questions for phase 2.

Survey results: In January there was a subcommittee meeting focused on survey interpretation. Brian Barber from PC met with subgroup.

Brian Barber from Planner's Collaborative:

There were three surveys. Residents by mail, business by mail, and telephone survey a bit later. Done in March, April, May, and June. Correlated demographics with census to verify results. Lots of questions, some open, some closed. Interpretative problems - partial non-responsive (do blanks - explicit "no opinion"). In first draft of reporting on results, blanks were left out. In second draft, these were explicitly included. The problem is that it means that explicit answers were watered down as a percentage. But at least the way we did it the 2nd time, you can calculate it either with or without blanks. Open-ended questions of course have an even higher non-answer rate. All surveys had statistically significant responses. 1400 returns for resident survey. 80 returns for business survey. 366 responses in phone survey.

Final revised survey results have been emailed out to committee. Hardcopy is available.

Kathryn Acerbo-Bachman looked at open-ended results to try and recode them. Summary so far on first two questions: 'Assets' stayed about the same. In the 'Challenges' question, "Erosion of town character" and "high cost of living" came out as more important than before.

Discussion between Daphne & Kathryn about how to represent this new data, due Friday: does it change the original percentages, or add a new set of information?

Kathryn proposes that certain details need to be highlighted that are popping out with these percentages. Daphne suggests this is phase 2 stuff. Basic high-level summary is OK for phase 1. The detailed data is still present and we can go back to it for phase 2.

Ann Sussman: There's a strong sense of urgency in the details - lets rewrite the top-level to reflect the urgency.

Daphne: Here's the new executive summary. Shorter, more targeted.

Ann: But it's still too complicated. Presented a possible new draft, shorter, simpler, and focused. Declarative sentences.

Daphne: It's too late.

Terra: But these concerns have been expressed for a while. It's not too late.

Ann: I mean, the town of Dennis did this simple statement.
(referred to email sent to committee)

Roland: But that was a final statement.

Ryan: Likes page 3, middle column (the reverse-highlighted version).

[some cross-talk.]

Daphne: Let's have lots of different ways of looking at it. Some folks like the numbers. Some like the narrative, some like bullets.

Mary Ann: Four pages is about right, enough to give everyone something to look at.

Linda: Process through these months has been frustrating. Not everyone will like it. This isn't the master plan - lets get the high-level correct & not worry about the details. The data is there for the more detailed stage 2, and for anyone to look at.

Bob: We can't boil it down further, because there were many points of view.

Terra: Now that she knows that the Dennis statement was a final statement, let's just call our something like a preliminary vision.

Lauren: How about 'emerging vision'?

Xuan: some numbers are wrong.

Daphne: Yes, that's right, we haven't put the new numbers yet.

DECISION: It will be retitled 'emerging' vision statement.

Joe: The vision statement does not stand on its own - please remember that.

Dick: also frustrated with process, because he's looking ahead to how we get things done & doesn't know how we will get there - he wishes we were at the stage of working on a few specifics.

Mary Ann: Maybe it should include an invitation to continue - if you don't see what represents you, get involved in the next stage.

Lauren: This is just the first 'sift'.

Terra: using 'emerging' resolves her concerns.

Roland: Maybe we can add a short summary, but we do need the 4 pages.

Daphne & Ann will work on a possible extra piece of wording, the 'short thing'.

Daphne: some stuff make it to a vision statement that doesn't necessarily have 50% support via surveys, because of the additional input from open-ended discussions. Kathy was fine with that now that it is called 'emerging'.

Daphne has added a column that shows priority challenges, synthesizing meetings AND surveys.

[A diversionary discussion on surveys vs. meetings.]

On p. 3 of the Executive Summary - change to 'feedback' to clarify that data was not just from surveys.

"Here's what we heard from" should lead to an invitation to participate further in the next phase, with its own header.

Change "survey highlights" to "Your Feedback" or "Citizen feedback".

Make the boxes on p. 3 of the Executive Summary better defined (what is from the survey/what is from the meetings).

Now there is a table of contents (reviewer couldn't find it before).

A comment about property taxes. Raised outside of citizen review - Roland says since it wasn't in the public process, it shouldn't be included. This was a concern from Kathryn...she talked about it again & decided it was a phase 2 concern.

[Change of note-taker: Jim went home, Lauren Rosenzweig took over]

Maybe add 'perhaps' or 'exploring' in re: town shuttle on p. 28 of the Report.

Let's get the document out! Let's include something on who we are, and say 'this is what we learned so

far'. Maybe have an FAQ to explain process?

Town Reports → Announce at Town Meeting, give out the shorter summary at town meeting.

Put in both libraries. We should put out a brochure and have the complete report on the website. We need volunteer labor for the next phase. Terra laid out the framework for the next phase – need to get process going. Tasks: In-house & consultant, “Plan how we do the Plan”. A Newspaper article.

Mary Ann Ashton → Ann Sussman will compile what we agreed to incorporate (and ask a few others to help proofread the revised Report based on tonight’s discussion).

Decision: Unanimous vote to accept report with the amendments discussed and agreed to tonight.

Info Button – Questions – contact Kristin.

Adjourned 9:45.

Minutes submitted by Jim Snyder-Grant based on notes from Lauren Rosenzweig and Jim.