

Planning Board Minutes from September 14, 2022

In attendance:

Steve Freedman, Richard Nathhorst, Tom Ewing, Swan Keyes, Van Stoddard, Tim Shores

Minutes taken by Tim Shores

1. Unanimously accepted minutes of August meeting.
2. CANCELED: Agenda item scheduled for 7:45 pm: Discussion of thoughts of Jim Perkins regarding Property on Amherst Road.
 1. After requesting this agenda item, Jim Perkins called to tell Richard that he decided not to continue pursuing his ideas about the Kitteridge estate.
 2. Jim's idea: the town could purchase the property and use it as a municipal facility (e.g. a site for services, or a kind of town center).
3. The Planning Board discussed the latest news about the Kitteredge estate (e.g. Wall Street Journal, the latest assessment, the potential outcomes of the sale of the property)
4. Tom brought up the matter of water and sewer infrastructure for Leverett. He has learned from his own research and from the document provided by Emily Innes this summer that Massachusetts allows shared septic systems. Leverett could consider changing its rules to allow for shared septic.
 1. Richard pointed out that we can change the local zoning and local Board of Health rules, but the local soil and geological characteristics of Leverett need to be able to support that much septic capacity on a given lot.
 2. Van asked if this is a matter that the Comprehensive Plan could help clear up -- Tom said that it is. Van pointed out that the low density of lots in Leverett comes from a time when the town decided to prohibit raised septic systems in new construction, so that is another technique that we could revisit in the Plan.
 3. Richard added that he has learned from meetings with FRCOG and Tighe & Bond (engineering, design, planning, and environmental consulting service provider based in Westfield MA) that they would advise that Leverett consider a 60-year plan to build water and sewer infrastructure, and that a sound way to take a first step on that 60-year plan is to pick a site where you can build a small municipally-owned shared septic system that serves multiple existing buildings, and potentially new developments. This municipally-owned shared system would give the town an opportunity to incrementally learn what it takes to properly plan, develop, operate, and maintain a shared septic system. Eventually the shared septic system would reach local soil capacity, and then the town can consider the next big step, which is a plan to connect

the lots on that shared septic system to a nearby treatment facility (either the one in Amherst or the one in Montague).

5. Steve pointed out that this is interesting but several steps ahead of where we're at in the Comprehensive Planning process. In the interest of taking on what we can take on, he requested that we move on to the next agenda item.
6. Planning Board survey progress: Swan had distributed a survey to Planning Board members, and Steve and Swan reminded everyone to take the survey. The next step will be to design this survey to support the Comprehensive Planning Steering Group and general communications. Swan will show results of the survey after everyone has submitted.
7. The Board reviewed the Comp Plan phase 1 report Evaluation of Deliverables, written by Steve in August. (See Evaluation appended to these minutes.) In particular, Steve wants to know what we should do about his final conclusion: "I'm wondering if phase 2 of this project will require too much effort from too many people given the size of our town and limited interest I sensed from the community. Much outreach on the part of the PB will be required." The Board discussed this and related Steering Group recruitment and planning matters, and arrived at these goals:
 1. By next meeting, each PB member will think of two Steering Group candidates to consider.
 1. Until then we should avoid giving people the impression that we are inviting them to join. If comfortable discussing with others, Planning Board members could ask around to get people's thoughts, but make an effort to be clear that we are not yet inviting or selecting people to join the Steering Group.
 2. How many people should be on the steering committee? Goal is between 8-15.
 3. Tim produced a list of people who have expressed interest (mostly from the Working Group survey taken last spring), and shared with the Board members by email.
8. Call in Business: Tim recounted the email from Cynthia Baldwin & Friends of North Leverett Sawmill and the plan for a trail on town property. Friends of NLS met with Conservation Commission about how to get permission to make trails on land owned by the town. ConCom said they don't have that authority. Cynthia wrote to Tim to ask if they needed to discuss with the Planning Board; Tim brought it to Ken and Steve's attention. Conclusion was to refer Cynthia to Margie to direct her to the right people, and welcome Cynthia to briefly present her plan at the Planning Board if she wanted to share in that forum.

EVALUATION OF DELIVERABLES
Leverett Comprehensive Plan Phase 1: 2002

Task 1: Establish a Master Plan Working Group, a Process for Transparency and Approval, and Initiate the Project (A minimum of three meetings)

- **The contracted Planning Consultant will assist the Planning Board with recruitment of a Master Plan Working Group.**

Emily was instrumental in helping the PB with outreach, including design of a recruitment mailer and suggestions for maximizing diversity.

- **The Consultant will assist the Planning Board on a process for maintaining transparency with stakeholders and for determining the final approval process.**

Unclear about Emily's role in maintaining transparency with stakeholders. This was largely a PB driven task. She was involved in discussions about the final number of Working Group members and was involved with the final count, which was a bit larger than originally anticipated. This worked out once attrition thinned the group. Perhaps she could have anticipated this more.

- **The Consultant will review Zoning Bylaws and documents to be referenced as listed in this project scope or identified during the planning process.**

Emily seemed to have enough of a working knowledge of Leverett zoning and other documents to be able to steer the Working Group meetings.

- **The Consultant will facilitate a Working Group meeting to discuss the scope of work, timeline, roles and responsibilities.**

Completed as required. Emily did a good job leading the group select a volunteer to head the WG. Emily was also present in person at two WG meetings at Town Hall. With assistance from Richard Natthorst and Tim Shores these meetings were attended virtually by about half the group.

- **The Working Group will provide previous planning documents for meeting review, and the groups will tour key sites and spaces in town with the Consultant.**

Many documents were supplied to Emily by Tim Shores (not the WG). Emily spent a day touring Leverett visiting key sites with several members of the PB and Susan Mareneck.

- **Task 2: Existing Conditions (A minimum of three meetings)**

- **The Consultant will facilitate Working Group development of a baseline understanding of existing conditions to organize their research.**

The “working group” quickly shrunk as several members failed to attend meetings. Emily was able to coax a volunteer for chair and seemed to keep the smaller group on task despite having to conduct meetings both in person and virtual simultaneously (2 meetings). I felt she struggled to do this, although I was not present for some of the meetings.

- **The Consultant will create a plan for the visioning process in the next task, including collaboration with the Working Group to identify the optimal number of meetings needed for Phase 2.**

Emily presented a plan, breaking it up into 6 specific tasks, and including a schedule taking us through to final plan approval in Fall 2023. This looks quite detailed and provides a blueprint for action.

- **The consultant will include a suggested list of GIS format maps and other data to describe existing conditions as part of their proposal.**

Done, more than any human could possibly read. But it appears to be all there.

OTHER THOUGHTS

- Having never been through a process like this, it was unclear to me what to expect. On a personal level I thought Emily was responsive to our needs as we thrashed around at the beginning.

- I was not at most of the Working Group meetings. General impression from the two I attended is that these were not very productive. Emily worked hard to get the group involved with limited success.
- Emily can be very wordy in her writing. The Executive Summary was 12 pages. I feel it should have been 1 or 2 with references to the other points she wanted to make.
- I'm wondering if phase 2 of this project will require too much effort from too many people given the size of our town and limited interest I sensed from the community. Much outreach on the part of the PB will be required.