

Planning Board Meeting Minutes

By Zoom

February 8, 2023

Present:

Swan Keyes, Stephen Friedman, Richard Nathhorst, Van Stoddard, Tom Ewing
(Ken and Tim absent)

Guests: Emily Innes, Tracy Adamski, Chris Herlich

1. January Planning Board Minutes Approved
2. Consultant Emily Innes introduced her colleagues who will assist with the Comprehensive Plan development process. Planning Board members shared background and hopes/views on Comprehensive Plan.
3. Discussion about Comprehensive Plan process:
 - Comprehensive Plan process arose partly out of economic development committee process and concerns about high tax rate, limitations to commercial and housing development, and zoning restrictions.
 - PB would like as diverse a range of perspectives shared as possible, from all segments of the town's population.
 - As many people engaged as possible (not all have to be on a committee)
 - Elements to consider:
 - UMass is growing and is economic engine of the area. Leverett has very limited housing development as UMass has grown.
 - Some primary Issues PB would like the Comprehensive Plan to address:
 - High Tax Rate
 - Whether and how to add new housing
 - Whether and how to add new commercial opportunities
 - Preserving the rural nature of the town and protecting the environment
 - Leverett Pond—environmental and economic issues
 - Water/wastewater/sustainable infrastructure
 - Discussed some of the logistics of the Comprehensive Plan process, including development of task force and possible focus groups.

- Consultants will train steering committee members to facilitate steering committee meetings and conversations but not all committee members will be required to facilitate. Need robust steering committee to facilitate these meetings and possibly fan out to other town committees and groups to collect feedback.
- Important to recruit diverse group of people who are not already active in town government. Include range of experience and representation of all groups within the population.
- Planning Board members have begun reaching out to community informally to inform people that Planning Board is beginning this process and will recruit participants.

4. Steering Committee:

- Goal is to create an active steering committee of 12-15 people by April. If there are not 12-15 people willing and able to commit to full process it is possible to break up roles and responsibilities so SC can be smaller and non SC members may be able to volunteer facilitate.
- Recommendations from consultants:
 - Steering committee members should represent a broad range of interests.
 - People with open minds.
 - Recruit people who have particular interests but understand that they are interested in the town as a whole, not just one particular interest. People with an ax to grind—issue they won't budge on—can disrupt process if unable to consider multiple perspectives (good to have passion for issues AND ability to hear others).
 - People who have knowledge of history.
- Tom reached out to Gary Gruber to see if he would be willing to chair the steering committee; he would be willing to be on the steering committee, may not be chair.
- Stephen reached out to Jenny and she would like to be on the steering committee (not chair).
- Other people to recruit for steering committee: Someone from Board of Health, public safety, and council on aging (or someone who is very involved with concerns of elderly residents), Wes Goscinski, Barbara Carulli from affordable housing committee and tax committee, Pete (Cushman's), real estate professionals, economic development committee—**Tom** will get names—Wright brothers?? Jan Bergstrom?
- **Stephen** will invite Matt Boucher, highway and roads.
- **Swan** will reach out to:
 - Isaiah of Grassroots Landscaping

- Aaron of the restorative justice program at Amherst Regional High School.
- LES teacher Bill Stewart and Dawn (retired outdoor education leader at LES)
- Member of Sikh community
- LES for Student Council member participation
- **Action item: For Steering Committee recruitment, need clear description of roles, responsibilities, authority, and number of hours required to effectively serve on steering committee. Emily will develop this.**
- Ensure that it is clear how Steering Committee and other committees' processes and outcomes will impact Comprehensive Plan. (Address concern about community members giving input but not seeing that input reflected later in the process. Clarify that their role and impact may be.)
- Will use some planning methods that are non-traditional, tailored to Leverett's needs—creative engagement strategies like getting people into new settings (out of the regular planning offices); possible outdoor meetings and meeting at various sites like school, library, peace pagoda, and other sites.
- Discussed possibility of daylong session retreat-workshop feeling where we can include several different sessions for different topics. **Swan** will contact Montague Retreat Center as a venue option.
- Include oral history traditions in some way
- Childcare and food are helpful for recruiting parents and families.
- April-August: focus on setting the scenarios and options and bringing that forward to the community for input and feedback.
- September: start making recommendations for policy changes.

5. **Next steps:**

- Consultants will produce 1-page (or so) document to steer us.
- Planning Board members will visit each town committee to inform them and drum up enthusiasm for the Comprehensive Plan process.
- Continue recruiting for Steering Committee.
- Consider changing PB meetings from Weds eves to Thursday or possible Tuesday.