

# *Leverett Comprehensive Plan Steering Group*

Meeting #6: September 26 2023, 6:30pm to 8pm  
Leverett Safety Complex training room

Steering Group members present in person (9): Silas Ball, Arlyn Diamond, Gary Gruber, David Henion, Isaiah Robison, Bob Weitzman, Nicole Vajda, Kimberly Van Wagner, Andrew Vlock
Steering Group members absent (4): Matt Boucher, Jenny Daniell, Sarah Dolven, Jim Field
Clerk present in person: Tim Shores
Planning consultant Emily Innes attended by Zoom No other attendants by Zoom
Meeting began at 6:30pm

**Gary moved to accept minutes** of the September 19, 2023 meeting. Andy seconded. Vote for the motion passed unanimously.

## **General discussion and decision-making about Town-wide Survey**

- Kimberly described the survey matters in need of decision before Emily can distribute it to the town.
  - Kimberly had circulated the most recent draft to the Steering Group (SG) by email.
  - She heard from one SG member with objections to the demographic questions in the survey's final section. ○ She met with a UMass professor of statistics who lives in her neighborhood to get insight about the privacy and ethics of the demographic questions proposed by Tim, and by Emily (reminder that there were two sets of demographic questions). The statistician advised Kimberly: Need to be able to provide a data security policy, and it's better to use the national census as a standard model for demographic questions, rather than the Fair Housing Act (which is what Tim proposed that we use as a standard).

- She then opened the discussion to general feedback about the survey, with a reminder that SG would focus on the matter of demographic questions later in this meeting.
  - Arlyn would like to see “N/A” options for more of the questions, including the Likert scale items.
  - David would like to see a values-oriented question about town autonomy, asked in a way that invites people to share their attitudes about control of town political matters by outside entities. Andy spoke up in favor of this idea.
  - Bob pointed out that the survey begins by setting the expectation that it will take 10 minutes to complete. It took him 25 minutes.
  - Silas and Isaiah requested paper copies of the survey that they could review after tonight’s meeting.
    - Silas explained that he began reviewing the survey. He didn’t like the questions he was seeing, so he stopped reviewing after the first section. He wondered if the questions were recycled from questions used for all towns, more reflective of Eastern Massachusetts priorities and values. He said that he was glad that he didn’t see the demographic questions. In light of tonight’s discussion, he requested more time to review the survey.
    - Tim raised the point that Kim sent the survey in advance to Maureen Ippolito’s email address, and the expectation was that Maureen would share these communications with Silas, so that Silas could review materials in advance of the SG meetings. If this email by proxy arrangement doesn’t work, Tim stated that Silas should meet the Steering Group halfway by reaching out to others between meetings to get documents and other information. He also stated that he feels it is important that Silas have a chance to fully review the survey, but also SG is working under the pressure of time limits.
    - Silas disagreed that he ever said that the Steering Group could communicate with him via Maureen’s email address. He reminded Tim that he said he did not use computers when he first joined this project’s Working Group in Phase 1. He explained that Emily has been good about reaching out to sharing relevant documents with him, but that the Steering Group has been inconsistent about it.
    - Tim echoed that it is not Silas’s preference to receive communication via Maureen’s email; and will work to remember that going forward.

- Kim proposed that we table the final survey decision to give Silas and Isaiah more time to review.
- Andy volunteered to follow-up with them to get their feedback.
- Tim suggested that the Steering Group make Silas, Isaiah, and Andy a subcommittee with authority to give a go/no-go decision about the survey outside of Steering Group quorum. This will let us hand off the final approved version to Emily without requiring another public meeting.
- SG members raised no objections to these plans.

### **Emily reviewed Community Vision (CV) meeting options and facilitated decisions**

- See the appendix to these minutes for the document that Emily reviewed with SG.
- From the Steering Group point of view, the CV meetings are primarily focused on information-gathering. SG members are there to help meeting participants orient themselves to the data, answer questions, facilitate discussion, but most of all, to record responses. Emily did suggest that we could provide forms to let participants take their own notes that they would submit at the end of the meeting.
- Data to be presented will be the same as what the consultants presented to the SG at the June meeting. The grouping of topics (p. 2 of her document) came from previous SG meeting discussions and from the Phase 1 Working Group discussions and Existing Conditions report.
  - Tim asked if there will be more information about zoning, because at the June meeting, the zoning analysis was not complete.
- Emily responded that it depends on SG decisions and community support.
  - The group deliberated pros and cons of the meeting format options from Emily's document.
    - General agreement that **Option 1: Data Walk** format seems more possible than **Option 2: Table Discussions**.
  - SG considered a Data Walk without a general presentation by consultants, which may not engage people well in this meeting format.
    - Arlyn asked Emily to add arts and crafts as a topic, with nature and education programs that Leverett is known for, such as at the LCA. This contributes to the employment base.

- Emily agreed that this was an important detail, but that the topics are designed to not name specific businesses, organizations, or affinity groups.
  - The topic of arts and crafts as livelihood could be discussed at the Data Walk at the tables for:
    - **Building Community** (which includes Section 81D elements Services and Facilities, Housing, Economic Development, Recreation, and Cultural Resources)
    - **Cost of Municipal Services/Tax Revenue** (which includes all 81D elements, plus the Leverett-specific topics of Sustainability, Circulation (Transportation), and Infrastructure, and will include data on *Employment Base*)
    - **Zoning changes and best practices** (which includes 81D elements Land Use, Open space, Natural Resources, Economic Development, and Infrastructure)
      - SG members discussed how it could help to keep topics more general at the October CV meeting. Based on information gathered at big and small CV meetings, SG could decide to get more specific at the December CV meeting.
- David advised preparing poster-sized prints of maps that show existing conditions data presented in June, for both big and small CV meetings. Emily replied that she has a plotter and will include 24"x36" maps on posterboard as a part of her "meeting kit".
- Special Town Meeting scheduled November 4, 2023: All are in agreement that an announcement and materials at the STM will be important. David volunteered to take responsibility for this---he already took the initiative of reaching out to Town Clerk Lisa Stratford to begin preparing for this. All SG members agreed: good plan and thank you for taking the initiative.
- **Unanimously decided: Data Walk** is the preferred big CV meeting format for Leverett's Comprehensive Plan.
- In the interest of time, SG tabled decision-making about **Small Group Discussions**; Kimberly will follow up with Emily to coordinate that discussion.

### **Deliberation focused on survey draft demographic questions**

- Tim explained that there were four groups of questions to consider.
  - Questions that were on the survey draft sent to SG members after the 9/19 meeting:

- Emily's original demographic questions, which were informed by her experience in municipal planning and by priorities agreed to by the Phase 1 Working Group. These questions included asking respondents to volunteer their age, race/ethnicity, and status of employment, business ownership, and level of education. (These questions were on the survey draft under review.)
    - Tim's proposed additional demographic questions, which were informed by the protected classes defined by the Federal Fair Housing Act. The purpose and value of these are to communicate the Town's intent to conduct an inclusive and equitable planning project, and to help the Town learn from residents who belonged to marginalized groups about how their experience in Leverett compares to residents who do not belong to their groups.
  - Questions that were not on the survey draft sent to SG members after the 9/19 meeting:
    - At the 9/19 SG meeting, after deliberation and disagreement about Tim's proposed questions, Kim had proposed a compromise: ask a single open question similar to the phrasing, "*What are barriers to living your best life as a resident of Leverett?*" At that meeting, there was general agreement that this was a good approach.
    - After the 9/19 meeting, Tim had followed up by email with Jim, Gary, and Kim with another proposed compromise: rather than asking survey respondents about their own identities, we could ask them a multiple choice (select all that apply) question about which groups they felt are important for the Town to consider in municipal planning.
- Kim and Tim invited feedback on all these questions. There were multiple lines of deliberation.
  - Gary felt the demographic questions were offensive, and advised the SG not to prioritize putting people into groups and classes.
  - David finds the questions intrusive, and unnecessary because we can refer to demographic information from the Federal census or other sources.
  - Arlyn believes it is important to make space for people who are likely to feel overlooked by official and public process.
  - Bob described how his position had changed the previous week, from thinking these questions unhelpful to seeing their potential to help more people feel included.

- Nicole expressed concern that these questions would be ineffective at achieving the goal of inclusion, and risks offending potential respondents.
- Silas pointed out that it is against State ethics law for a Town to make policies that favor specific groups.
- Tim said the Comp Plan is also about organizing more people together in the public deliberative process, not just about policy. ○ Andy gave the example of his wife, who is not a US citizen and who feels it's important to be able to participate in public process, such as voting. (Silas pointed out that as of the most recent Town Meeting, non-citizens can vote and belong to committees in Leverett.)
- After around 20 minutes of deliberation, and following what seemed to be an emerging consensus, Andy moved that we only include Kim's question, "*What are barriers to living your best life as a resident of Leverett?*" ○

There was agreement to this, however, Tim pointed out that some of Emily's original questions were not about personal factors, so we should consider those separately. ○ More deliberation ensued until Kim moved that the SG vote on Emily's questions line-by-line, seconded by several SG members:

- *Age/How old are you*: 5 in favor, 4 opposed. **Approved.**
- *How long have you lived here*: 5 in favor, 4 opposed. **Approved.**
- *How long have you owned a business in Leverett*: 0 in favor, 9 opposed. **Not Approved.**
- *How long have you been an employee in Leverett*: 0 in favor, 9 opposed. **Not Approved.**
- *Race/ethnicity*: 0 in favor, 8 opposed, 1 abstention. **Not Approved.** ○ Finally, Kim seconded Andy's motion that the SG vote on her question, "*What are barriers to living your best life as a resident of Leverett?*": 8 in favor, 0 opposed, 1 abstention: **Approved.**
- Therefore, the final set of approved questions for the demographic section at the end of the survey is:
  - *Age/How old are you*
  - *How long have you lived here*
  - *What are barriers to living your best life as a resident of Leverett?*
- Additional discussion items about survey distribution:
  - David suggested that the demographic questions go at the beginning instead of the end. Tim replied that survey methods best practice is to put demographic questions at the end, because

survey response rate is higher when respondents can begin with substantive questions about the issues.

- A question was raised about allowing the survey to be anonymous. Tim pointed out that without requiring some kind of identification, we have no way to quality control duplicate responses or responses from people who don't live in Leverett. This matter was not clearly settled during the meeting.

#### **Call-in business and housekeeping items** Housekeeping:

- Silas, Isaiah, and Andy will meet as a subcommittee for final review of the survey, and Andy will follow up with Emily and the SG about the outcome of that meeting.
- Tim will email Lisa Stratford to reserve Town Hall first floor for the October CV meeting, October 17 from 3pm to 5pm, and 6pm to 8pm.
- SG agreed to schedule the next meeting for October 10, 2023, 6:30pm to 8pm. Andy will post official public notice at Town Hall and coordinate access to the Safety Complex (since he had to crawl through an unlocked Safety Complex meeting room window to coordinate access to this evening's meeting).

Meeting adjourned at 8:40pm.

*Minutes taken by Tim Shores*

#### **Appendix: Emily's deliverable provided in advance of the 9/26 SG meeting**



22111 – Town of Leverett  
Leverett Comprehensive Plan  
Notes for Discussion at 9/26 Steering Group meeting

#### **Options for Public Meeting #1**

**Option 1: Data Walk – good for communities where people can drop in for a short time and where people like to spend time considering data and their response.**

- Goal: Participants should familiarize themselves with the data and provide input on specific scenarios for future changes, shown at the stations.
- Short presentation welcoming people to the meeting (client), describing the process (client/consultant), providing initial information (consultant), and explaining the structure of the open house (consultant).
- Short Q&A after the presentation.
- People self-direct around stations reading material and providing comments. Stations may be staffed by consultant team/Steering Group members.

- Second Q&A at the end to capture people’s thoughts about what they have read/reviewed. **Option 2: Table Discussions – good for communities where people can spend more time (90 minutes) and want to discuss options with other community members.**
- Goal: Participants should familiarize themselves with the data and discuss specific scenarios for future changes, shown at the stations.
- Short presentation and Q&A as above; consultant explains the structure of the table exercises (consultant).
- People gather at tables to discuss topics. Tables may be facilitated by consultant team/Steering Group members.
- Second Q&A at the end to capture people’s thoughts about what they have read/reviewed.

Timing	Action	Timing	Action
Hour before start	Consultant team arrives. Volunteers helping with set-up and stations arrive.		
15 minutes before start	Meeting is open, people begin to arrive and register.		
20-30 minutes	Welcome presentation with short Q&A.	15-20 minutes	Welcome presentation with short Q&A.
45-55 minutes	People interact with the stations.	55-60 minutes	Table discussions – length depends on the number of topics. Topics or people could switch part-way through.
15 minutes	Follow-up Q&A		
90 minutes after start	Open House closes; volunteers assisting with break-down begin breakdown.	90 minutes after start	Workshop closes; volunteers assisting with break-down begin break-down.
Half-hour after end	Break-down complete.	Half-hour after end	Break-down complete.

**Possible Stations/Table Topics (Section 81D topics in parentheses)**

Topics	Section 81D Elements and Other Topics	Data for Inclusion/Generation by Participants
Building Community	Services and Facilities, Housing, Economic Development, Recreation, Cultural Resources	Demographics Existing Groups Past Events Neighborhood Maps



Cost of Living/Attracting Younger Families	As above plus Energy and Education	Housing data – new starts, availability, affordability School population projections Resources for families What families want
Cost of Municipal Services/Tax Revenue	All 81D elements, plus Sustainability, Circulation, Infrastructure	Employment Base Housing Projections Infrastructure needs and costs Water supply map Roadway maps
Supporting Rural Activities	Land Use, Resiliency (including Climate), Housing, Economic Development, Open Space, Natural Resources	Open space maps Agriculture maps and activities Relationship of existing neighborhoods to open space/natural resources
Supporting Rural-Appropriate Development	Infrastructure, Housing, Economic Development	Historic development patterns and building types Missing housing types Missing business types Options for supporting infrastructure
Zoning changes and best practices	Land Use, Open Space, Natural Resources, Housing, Economic Development, Infrastructure	Areas to preserve/areas to develop – see map from Phase 1 Existing and potential development controls Initial build-out?
Developing Goals	Test existing goals from recent plans	MVP Resiliency 2020 Open Space and Rec 2019 Preservation Planning 2018
Developing Benchmarks	All	What represents success?

**Small Group Discussions**

- Depends on which option is chosen for the meeting.

- Will need to know how many meetings are likely to take place and who will be included. This will help tailor materials.

<b>Suggested by the Steering Group</b>	<b>Standard IA Meeting-in-a-Box</b>
Large, printed maps of the town mounted on foam board	What size will be most useful? We usually provide 11x17 for small meetings, but it will depend on the information we show and the number of maps.
Sign in sheets (blank) and clipboards	IA can provide our standard sign-in sheets.
QR code postcards/fliers about survey	IA can design the postcards/fliers and provide the QR code.
Printouts of brief questionnaire or some talking points that get conversations going	IA can provide a talking points sheet.
Notetaking form/guidelines	IA can provide a note-taking template. Also a way to capture: "Can you think of anyone else we should talk to?" and "Can you help us connect with them?"
Something brief to leave with people for them to take home and spread the word	Business cards with links to the Planning Board sites and dates of the next public meeting? Will the small groups start before the first public meeting.
Volunteer sign-up sheets	IA can provide volunteer sign-in sheets. We also recommend sign-in sheets for people who want to participate in the small group discussions at the first meeting.

Note: For expenses by Steering Group members – the Planning Board should confirm the dollar amount of funds remaining after the contract with Innes Associates to understand how much is available. Some was set aside for the postcard printing costs.

## **Standard Workshop Needs (to be revised by workshop type)**

1. Registration table
  - a. Sign-in sheets (See PDF)
  - b. Easel with instructions
  - c. Pens
  - d. How-to for the event
  - e. Volunteers (1-2)
2. Food table
  - a. Food and drink from Planning Board
  - b. Volunteers (1-2)
3. For each station:
  - a. Volunteer/Staff
  - b. One-two boards and easels (10 total)
  - c. One table
  - d. 3x3 sticky notes
  - e. Number dots (see PDF)
  - f. Pens
  - g. Binder clips for maps
4. Childcare (Provided by Client) "Draw what you like best about Leverett?"
  - a. Roll of Kraft paper
  - b. Box of crayons
  - c. Reward stickers
5. Other needs:
  - a. Projector (Venue or IA)
  - b. Screen (Venue)
  - c. Microphone (IA)
  - d. Laptop (IA)
  - e. Camera/phone