

Planning Board Special Meeting – Master Plan Review
Thursday, March 4, 2021
Meeting Minutes

Attendance: Brad Hutchison, Diane Mulvaney, Melissa O'Brien, Joanna Brown, Nate Therien, Michael Adelman; Richard Harris, Planning Director; Anne Capra, Assistant Planner

Chair Hutchison called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Ms. O'Brien stated she had some comments regarding content reviewed at the last meeting including getting clarification about the Recreation Department's current actions: "Focusing on ages outside of school age or mixed ages and non-sport related activities". She also suggested that Lithia Springs and the Mount Holyoke Range be added as "Recreation Areas" on page 12.

Ms. Brown stated she would like to see captions for each of the photos to inform the reader about the many places illustrated in the plan. She also suggested that the Table of Contents list the chapter numbers because the chapters are numbered inside the report.

Discussion resumed on *Chapter 4 Future Land Use Map*. Comments on the map included the following:

- Add "existing" to affordable units in legend to help reader understand what the number in the symbol is.
- Services and Facilities icons are way too busy on the map and hard to read, especially in the Falls. Consider a separate full-page map for the Falls to improve legibility.
- Due to the scale of the map, there are no street names, other than route numbers, which makes the map hard to read. However, the scale of the map would make adding street names difficult.
- An alternative map layout is needed to make the content more readable. Suggestions included a north and south map, a Falls map, or some other options such as one map for Preservation and Development, and another for Services and Facilities.
- Call out bubbles with text are not totally accurate and not consistent. Perhaps remove some that are not related to "future land use". For example, why is "Bachelor Brook Stony Brook" a callout. The location is already conserved open space, and other protected conservation areas are not named.

Members discussed origin of term "priority locations for development", which were identified at the first community forum called Balance Preservation and Development, and carried forward at other community forums. Ms. Brown inquired as to why the Village Commons is noted as a focus for development when it is already a developed area. Mr. Harris noted that density on the site could be increased and it is serviced by bus transit. New buildings constructed on the paved parking lot would not increase impervious surfaces. Mr. Hutchinson noted a new parking garage would increase their options for new mixed use/multiuse development. Mr. Harris noted they have considered this in the past, and Ms. Brown noted she has seen such proposals be cost prohibitive in other places. Ms. O'Brien noted that the development hubs appeared to be the same as the 2010 plan. The Route 202/33 study is not finalized and may inform this mapping.

Members discussed that the map didn't identify "future" areas of affordable housing, just the existing units, and that future locations for affordable housing are not known per se and could be constructed in many places. Members began to discuss the difference between "affordable" housing with a small "a", and "Affordable" housing with a capital "A".

Discussion continued to *Chapter 5 Plan Recommendations*.

Members discussed how to better highlight the noted “major areas of discussion” that frame the plan in the first paragraph so it isn’t lost by the reader, i.e. subheader, bullets, or numerical ordering of content – 1), 2), etc. Ms. Brown recommended removing “high-level” before SWOT on p. 42, and cautioned about the use of the word “Threat”. Members discussed the meaning of a SWOT and its use in this process. Ms. O’Brien noted that since the public forum did involve a SWOT analysis, it should be recognized as such within that context. However, it might make sense to then describe the findings in the plan with different titles such as strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results, for example.

Members discussed the “Threats” and how some as presented aren’t actual threats but are rather threatened, i.e. Equity. Equity is not a threat but rather could be threatened. Members further discussed the use of the term LatinX and whether it was a broadly accepted term and not offensive to all groups. This needs to be researched further as the use of the term has evolved over time. “Aging Population” is not a Threat, but rather the quality of life for our aging population is threatened. Need to review how the content in the SWOT is presented and re-work so it reads as intended.

Members then discussed the lack of diverse housing options, as referenced as a “Weakness” on p.43. Members provided examples of different housing types they have experienced and how it created an opportunity or challenge at various times in their lives. More affordable housing options would help foster a thriving community for all people of all ages which was a goal identified in the Master Plan draft. The comparison between affordable housing options (“a”) versus Affordable Housing (“A”) was discussed. These different affordable housing types can be influenced by the entities involved in their creation. For instance, private developers and public housing programs have different goals and resources available to them. Factors that could support or inhibit affordable housing include zoning, design standards, and community willingness to support a type of housing, i.e. accessory dwelling units, multi-family houses, apartment buildings, etc.

Members discussed Figure 5.1 Flood-Prone Areas and how “flood-prone areas” areas were identified. Ms. Capra noted that the information was collected at a public forum. Mr. Hutchinson questioned whether areas with seasonal highwater tables should be identified as flood prone. The regulatory flood hazard info is only complete for Holyoke, but not South Hadley so the map presents as if those areas don’t apply to South Hadley which is confusing. More background information is needed in the plan to note the status of the FEMA flood mapping for South Hadley, and what this information on the map really represents, i.e. not regulatory but rather data to consider when planning for climate change.

Members discussed Sustainability and Resiliency (p.47). These topics are relevant to all other categories within the plan. Ms. O’Brien noted that at community forums, there seemed to be an interest from the public to get more serious about sustainability. She recommended that any recommendations for sustainability and resiliency be as prescriptive as possible. The “Recommendations” notes that they are incorporated into the objectives and actions for all four goals. Mr. Therien recommended pulling out the actions related to resiliency and highlighting them rather than incorporating as part of some other objective.

Discussion moved on to “Housing Variety” on p.48. Members discussed that there was a lot of content on this page and that the major points need to be more clearly identifiable graphically. Members questioned why only three areas of town are focus for development of housing options (p.50). Recommendations could be broader including exploring other housing options by neighborhood

through exploring lot sizes and frontages, alternative zoning options, design criteria, and any other innovative strategies. Members continued to discuss the different types of affordable housing.

Ms. Brown motioned to adjourn at 7:57 PM, Mr. Therien seconded. All in favor via roll call vote.

REMINDERS – THINGS TO COME BACK TO -ITEMS TO CARRY FORWARD

- Contact Recreation Department to get clarification on current action: “Focusing on ages outside of school age or mixed ages and non-sport related activities”. (p.29)
- Lithia Springs and the Mount Holyoke Range be added as “Recreation Areas” on page 12.
- Add captions to photos.
- Add chapter number to Table of Contents.
- Term “LatinX” needs to be researched and determine if it is appropriate.
- Figure 4.1 Future Land Use Map needs to be re-worked to improve readability. See comments above.
- Plan needs to include a discussion about different types of “affordable” housing – “a” and “A”
- Ch. 5 SWOT analysis presentation needs to be re-worked. See comments above.
- Figure 5.1 Flood-Prone Areas needs to be re-worked or removed
- List specific recommendations for “Sustainability and Resiliency” rather than bury in other goals and objectives.

NEXT MEETING

Thursday, March 18th at 6pm

Respectfully submitted by,
Anne Capra, AICP
Assistant Planner/Conservation Administrator