

**Master Plan Implementation Committee  
Meeting Minutes  
June 5, 2023  
7:15 PM- 9:19 PM**

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**Committee Present:** Chairperson Mark Silverberg, Vice Chairperson Wendy Mickel, Patrick Welch, Maria Barney, Ding Han, Tom Bleier, Dan Schur, Christina Kelleher, Catherine Nourse, Hank Rauch, Stephanie Doyle

**Also present:** Kristen Belanger-Planning Dept. Administrative Assistant

**Not present:** Jack Haagensen , Kristi Williams, Kris Allen

The meeting of the Westborough Master Plan Implementation Committee was held in the Fire Dept. Training Room on Milk St in Westborough, MA. on Monday, June 5, 2023. The meeting was convened by Mark Silverberg at 7:15 PM.

**Senior Center Update**

Alma Demanche, Director of the Council on Aging presented. They have gone through the Needs Assessment completed by UMass Boston. They are almost back to pre-Covid service levels.

Ms. Demanche passed out the executive summary to the committee. It is also available online for the public. Everyone agrees there is currently not enough gathering space in the current center. They opened in 1989 and it was meant to span 20 years. A senior in Westborough is defined as a person 60 yrs. or older.

There was a public survey sent to everyone over 55 in Westborough. The senior census counted 5514 people. We received 1633 responses to the survey. A lot from the younger ages, they don't see the center in their future. When people first retire they are not ready for activities at the center. When they hit their early 70's they want things to do that are inexpensive and enjoyable with people their own ages.

Ms. Demanche spoke about the 8 Domains of Livability- the housing situation is not a good one. We need more affordable elderly housing.

Member Han asked what the income level would be to qualify for affordable housing. 80% for eastern Worcester County is around \$54k for family of 1. Formula is spending no more than 30% of income on rent and utilities. Federal income levels are \$42k.

With Housing Authority the Rent is based on 27% of a person's monthly income.

During Covid when the real estate market was high, owners sold their properties at inflated amounts. As a result, the new owners are charging higher rents to tenants that have been living in the same place for basically the same rent for 20 years.

When you apply for state subsidized housing, you are put on a state list. Towns cannot give preference to those that currently live in town. Housing authorities support people with less than 50% median income. The last housing authority units were built over 35 years ago.

Member Welch talked about tax classification, .6% of the entire budget is dedicated to human services. Of this .6%, half is allocated to Council on Aging and half goes towards Youth & Family Services. There is a tax relief program called "Senior/Veteran Property Tax Work Off Program". Qualified individuals can exchange work for up to \$1875 in credit towards their tax payment. Member Welch asked if there are other grant programs to get tax relief for home owners. There is a tax deferral program that is 0% interest, you can do for one year. People can also choose to pay back when the home is sold. Town has always done the maximum allowed by the Dept. of Revenue.

Handyman services and support services are critical. There is enough demand, we should look into expanding this for seniors. Ms. Demanche said individuals can apply for programs where boilers are paid for. Ms. Demanche has a handyman on board but he cannot do plumbing or electrical since you need a license. He has 8-15 requests per day. There are some things that local handymen will not do like putting stair treads down.

In the last 20 years, the town has built 8 of the 11 town buildings which is a huge debt service. The last year it was a 50/50 residential and commercial tax base was 1992. Commercial valuations go up and down. Residential goes down a lot less.

Ms. Demanche tries to respond appropriately to needs when they are made known. They have a lock box program to allow emergency services access. No soliciting signs are available to be posted in people's homes. We offer help moving into assisted living. There is a program for caregivers. Grab and go lunches are still offered. They recently started offering lunch on Wednesdays, they have Netflix working now.

In regards to transportation needs, ridership in the last 3 months has exploded. The Senior Center has had 2 buses on the road consistently. Anyone in a wheelchair or scooter would need to go on a bus, all are handicapped equipped.

The town has 3 buses currently, one is over 150k miles and needs to be replaced. This is something that needs to be entered into the capital planning process for Fall Town Meeting.

The Willows, the Senior Center, WRTA, etc, are all spending money on transportation. It would be nice to centralize this process. If someone came in for an over 55 community, it would be nice if Planning would consider a yearly contribution to a transportation fund.

Member Doyle asked how town leadership interacts with elected officials. She thinks this committee should be more strategic.

Member Welch met with Senator Moore to talk about tax classification. He thinks there should be a greater volume of taxes.

Ms. Demanche has a meeting with Senator Moore on Friday. This has been the worst year for fuel assistance. He set up 3-4 meetings with suppliers and they all cancelled.

### **Conservation Update**

Jennifer Miller attended. She has been the Conservation Director for the past 5 months. She came to Westborough from Seekonk, she was in San Diego before that.

**LU2-2: Explore the adaptive reuse policy.**

Brownfield Inventory-this explores other ways for additional funding to get properties back in use. Sometimes properties are vacant, there may be potential contamination. Brownfield funding allows for assessment, remediation and redevelopment.

Funded through EPA, Univ. of Connecticut is the vendor. Professors and students do an official inventory. Once sites are identified there are different funding opportunities through the state and federal level.

**NHC 1-2: Investigate opportunities to protect agricultural sites for the long term.**

You can't hold the restriction and be the owner at the same time. If you are farming the land it would allow for more wetland exemptions.

Land Prioritization Committee is working on putting together a list of acquisitions so when property is available, we know if it is a priority for the Town to acquire.

Ms. Miller believes the Town should make sure agriculture is a priority when dealing with Chapter 61 designations. She encourages thinking about multi use on properties preserving agricultural culture.

Community Preservation Committee is new, a % is designated for historical preservation, open space and recreation and affordable housing.

Chapter 61 is the agricultural designation when looking at change in use, the Town will have first right of refusal to purchase the property. The Open Space fund has been used to do this in the past.

Land Prioritization will be taking on categorization of all potential acquisitions.

**OSR 3-2: Expand outdoor rec uses.**

The Open Space Recreation Plan is due for a renewal in 2025. CPC funds are designated for active recreation. Not just for acquisition, can be renovation or upgrading of sites.

A Seekonk example was shared. CPC bought a historic site, structures were preserved. The interior was changed but outside looks the same. They will have trails, a community garden, athletic fields and a historic learning center.

**SCC 1-7: State and federal funding for climate action.**

Municipal Vulnerability Plan and Hazard Mitigation Plan are due for updates. Bipartisan infrastructure law, similar to ARPA, directed at the state level. As funding becomes available we need to have shovel ready projects in the pipeline.

If a culvert needs to be replaced, do we simply replace it or look at data to determine what future projections need to be.

If we have a section of a river or stream that is not functioning well, there is funding to help mitigate it.

Mitigation banks were used to offset development in San Diego. As developments come in to town, they pay into these mitigation banks to fund projects.

CPC in some towns have put a fund in place to use when parcels are available without having to go back to town meeting.

**SCC 4-1: Develop climate action playbook.**

Westborough has more division of labor in place. As we update MVP, dept.'s and committee should be brought in to address community needs as a whole.

Her office plays a major role in stormwater compliance and inspections but less with the community outreach component. She needs to determine how to get the message out to the most people. Community Development Department has a new sustainability coordinator position. This person will work with DPW, Engineering, Conservation etc.

**PH 2-5: Become age friendly community.**

This goal is not on the MPIC list, but Ms. Miller believes it to be important.

- When developing trails we should be looking at ways to open them to all user groups. Mobility issues have a range to be considered. Westborough has set aside a large amount of open space. Some of these funds should be directed towards accessibility.
- There are opportunities for programming.
- Action items to consider: an OSRP update, BIL Funding streams, increase ADA access.

Baystate Commons was a Brownfield site, Hocomonco Pond would be.

The property on Oak St by the courthouse has a private owner. The site has dilapidated buildings and the cost to clean them up is so high that the only way he can redevelop is to put high capacity residential in. Maybe we could help the owner find some funding to help clean up the site.

Brownfield would assist in getting sites remediated to remove hurdles from development. Member Bleier mentioned EDC should be actively involved in this.

**Member Schur made a Motion to approve the minutes from 5/22/2023. Member Rauch seconded.  
Vote: 10-0**

**Member Rauch made a motion to adjourn at 9:19 pm. Member Mickel seconded.  
Vote: 10-0**

*Respectfully Submitted by Kristen Belanger, Planning Dept. Admin. Assistant*



*\*One board member signature required for approval.*