

Town of Hingham



MASTER PLAN COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

June 24, 2020 at 7:00 PM

Join Zoom Meeting: <https://zoom.us/join>

Call in Number: 1-929-205-6099

Meeting ID: 813 8449 2330

Present Remotely: Gordon Carr, Paul Healey, Bob Hidell, Liz Klein, Adrienne Ramsey, Deirdre Anderson, Liz Klein, Michael Kranzley, Nancy Kerber, Liza O'Reilly, Jerry Seelen, Donna Smallwood, Bryce Blair, Vcevy Strekalovsky, Hans von der Luft. Also present: Mary Savage-Dunham.

Master Plan Committee (MPC) Chairman, Gordon Carr called the meeting to order at 7:05 PM and welcomed the Committee. He read the following statement into the record "This meeting is being held remotely as an alternate means of public access pursuant to an Order issued by the Governor of Massachusetts dated March 12, 2020 Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law. You are hereby advised that this meeting and all communications during this meeting may be recorded by the Town of Hingham in accordance with the Open Meeting Law. If any participant wishes to record this meeting, please notify the chair at the start of the meeting in accordance with M.G.L. c. 30A, § 20(f) so that the chair may inform all other participants of said recording." No person present indicated that they wanted to record the meeting. Judi Barrett and Alexis Lanzolotta were in attendance from the consulting team.

Mr. Carr then turned the meeting over to Judi Barrett to finish up the housing discussion with some summary questions. The first question was whether the town should take steps to encourage little a affordable housing and support the missing middle housing stock. Missing middle housing might be infill housing or a broader demolition delay bylaw or otherwise supporting diverse housing types. Ms. Barret described neighborhood conservation districts with the group and explained that they are created with a general by-law. The MPC was interested in finding out what other communities do and seeing what might be transferrable to Hingham and learning more about unrestricted affordable housing not just 40b housing units. The MPC was interested in learning more about the missing middle. There was interest in providing more ownership opportunities for families also, but also a discussion about leaving it to the tenants to determine if they want to rent or buy. Some of that is personal preference.

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Housing policy should not focus on owner versus renter and value one more than other. The committee expressed an interest in not negatively impacting existing single family neighborhoods with any work or development that happens. Diversity in housing increases diversity in population which was raised as a goal during the visioning sessions at the start of the property. Zoning changes will be needed to encourage diversity in housing. There are challenges to figuring out which tools are the right fit for the town in creating the missing middle so it will take time and patience to move it forward. The committee discussed inclusionary zoning in concept and how beneficial it would be in Hingham when applied. Allowing dense development is the easiest path to creating affordable units in town because density offsets the land costs.

The discussion then shifted to economic development and the discussion questions that were distributed. The first discussion was about what community needs the town should ask developers to meet as mitigation for any development that comes forward. The MPC discussed potential development to come and also prioritized being sure that the downtown doesn't suffer as other retail areas prosper. The group discusses split tax rates as a possible resources as well as a property transfer fee for land purchases over a certain threshold. There was interest in possibly having a lower tax rate for downtown businesses as opposed to the larger retail areas too. Open space and recreational space is important to have as part of any large economic development project also. The need to protect downtown from rising sea levels was discussed and what the impact on the downtown economic engine may be if the town doesn't improve the resilience of the harbor and downtown. Wayfinding for economic development is important. Creating a cultural district for downtown has been investigated over the past several months and it sounds like a great opportunity for Hingham. The Downtown Association would like to make the downtown more experiential. A visioning effort for the harbor and downtown area will be kicking off soon and will touch on much of the ideas involved in the creation of a cultural district. Proactive grant writing is not the character of the town but at budget time there is not much interest in spending general government funds for projects so it may be helpful to have a designated grant writer to support the ongoing efforts of town departments and the town vision.

Mr. Carr then discussed the next steps and thanked the committee for all their work to date and asked them to add more meetings to continue the great progress that is being made. The next step is to finalize the vision and goals, out of which will come the recommendations. As there was no other business the meeting adjourned at 9:31 pm.