

Master Plan Working Group

Wednesday, October 4th, 7:30 pm, Town Hall Minutes taken by Mary Anne Antonellis

MPWG members present: Meryl Mandell, Tim Logan, Mary Anne Antonellis, Jeff Lacy, Allen Hanson

MPWG members absent: Mike Vinskey and Michele Cunningham, Guest: Michael DeChiara

One change to a typo, second paragraph, September to October. Minutes approved with the one change. Meryl will submit to Town Clerk.

Selectboard meeting, October 3rd

Meryl and Jeff attended. The Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs have announced a grant opportunity which could be used to hire a consultant such as the Conway School to complete a study of Lot O-32. Jeff and Meryl presented the grant opportunity to the Selectboard. The Selectboard instructed Becky to begin the grant application for review at their next meeting, October 17th. The grant requires a 25% local match. Jeff thinks it might be possible to provide in-kind services for the match. If this is allowable, he will donate his professional services. The proposed Lot O-32 Committee and proposed charge will be discussed at the next Selectboard meeting too. Brief discussion about the scope of the grant/work proposed but since this project does not fall under the scope of the MPWG group charge discussion was ended.

Fiscal Responsibility/Sustainability

Meryl, Jeff and Mike attended a meeting with members of the Town's financial team and Joe Markarian, FRCOG financial consultant. Joe confirmed that long-range financial forecasting is problematic. Concrete projections can only be successfully accomplished for a few years out. There are many variables.

The Capital Planning Committee is going to try to do some longer range projections for capital expenses.

Tim expressed that all ideas expressed in the vision should be considered equally important.

Discussion about keeping in mind that the ideas expressed in the vision are aspirational and the Town is under no obligation to implement any or all aspects of the vision. Planning is not the same as doing. It is good to plan in the event that someday there is the will/ability to implement such plans.

There are already a lot of checks and balances to encourage fiscal responsibility/sustainability. Town meeting being the most important. But what kinds of things might we consider to save money.

Jeff has used the Valley Almanac, which he admits is not an entirely accurate publication, to create a matrix of the cost of government per capita in our region. Jeff asks, what are we getting for our high cost of government?

Others asked if it is fair to compare ourselves to other towns when we do not know all of the variables.

What can we suggest to the Selectboard to help them address fiscal sustainability/responsibility?

Mary Anne suggested the MPWG could send a statement to the Selectboard that includes the following ideas:

The research conducted by the MPWG suggests that townspeople are concerned about financial sustainability and responsibility.

The MPWG also recognizes that the Town has already begun a process of deepening the understanding of our financial practices and abilities with a grant funded consultant from FRCOG. This process will result in both short-term financial projections and a set of guiding documents to help the financial team understand and implement its role.

The MPWG encourages the Selectboard to ensure this inquiry continues and that the outcomes are shared with the Town publicly. Sharing the results of the process can help increase awareness and understanding about the Town's finances.

Jeff introduced discussion about finding a way to look at reducing Town spending.

Tim offered that finances are a difficult topic and that the MPWG spend the time between this meeting and the next considering how we can address this important topic in a meaningful way to the Selectboard.

In preparation for the third topic, "low-hanging fruit," Meryl asked Allen to forward relevant info from the CPC to the group for consideration.

A guest shared that the MPWG should not hold an attitude that all spending is bad. Sometimes it is important for a town to invest in itself. Fiscal sustainability does not necessarily mean not taking care of business.

Meeting adjourned at 9:15 pm.