

## **Great Barrington Master Plan Committee (MPC)**

Minutes of July 28, 2011

Great Barrington Fire Station  
37 State Road, Great Barrington

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The meeting was called to order at 7:30 PM by Co-Chairperson Michele Gilligan. She asked members to sign in and pick up their materials for the evening. She designated Andrew Blechman as the recording secretary.

Members present: Barbara Bailly, Andrew Blechman, Ryan Caruso, Richard Dohoney, Shep Evans, Michele Gilligan, Jonathan Hankin, Paul Ivory, Mary Beth Merritt, Jack Musgrove, Deborah Phillips, David Rutstein (Alternate, not voting), David Shanahan, Christine Ward (Alternate, voting), Michael Wise.

Members absent: Suzanne Fowle-Schroeder (Alternate), Bill Meier, Vivian Orłowski (Alternate), Karen Smith

Also present: Chris Rembold, Town Planner

### **Minutes of June 23, 2011**

After a motion by Hankin, seconded by Phillips, the minutes were approved as amended.

### **Subcommittees Task Force Report**

Gilligan gave the report of the Transportation task force. A copy was emailed to the Committee and is attached to this record.

She noted that transportation and circulation portions of the 1997 Plan included strategies to deal with projected increases in traffic congestion due to possible development. Among these were the recognition that full build out would require widening Route 7 to four lanes, and that a road parallel to Main Street through downtown might be required to ease congestion. The 1997 Plan also included implementation actions dealing with promoting walking and biking.

There was a brief overview of the 1974 Plan. It discussed the bypass plan; end of rail service (1971); replacing diagonal parking on Main St. with parallel; and encouraging mall-type development instead of strip mall development with multiple entrances/exits. The plan was critical of cars, noting that there were 23 gas stations along Rt. 7. There was concern that traffic growth would parallel population growth. It did not. They had 7,500 residents, we have 7,100. BRTA was discussed. It is still chugging along, and goes a lot of places, but not everywhere, and it's very slow.

A discussion of key data included information about public transportation options, routes, and costs (Berkshire Regional Transit Authority), a discussion about possible passenger railroad service connecting the town to New York. The task force also reported on traffic counts, parking requirements and how they are determined per zoning regulations, and recent planning for bicycle and pedestrian improvements.

The task force presented several considerations for the current master plan. These included promoting a sense of safety and well being in our neighborhoods through traffic calming and sidewalk and bike path

connections. The report also noted several abiding concerns, including parking and congestion in downtown,

The subcommittee agrees that one of its members should contact the Housatonic RR to learn of any updates. It is agreed that passenger travel to NYC via Danbury would be good for GB, especially economically. There is a question as to where the depots would be located.

Our bridges are in need of repair. We have 16 bridges in town, 10 of which are town responsibility.

There was a lengthy discussion of protecting and promoting ease of non-automobile movement within neighborhoods and between neighborhoods and disparate areas of town via connecting sidewalks, bike paths, and traffic calming. It was stated that neighborhoods should be a priority and these measures would make a big difference in residents' lives.

It was noted that the report was *not* finished, and will need additional work.

### **Review of the Vision Workshop**

Members shared their thoughts about the July 14 workshop.

In terms of the process, it was noted that the free form format was at times difficult to moderate, and it was difficult to address all items in a short period of time. Table leaders had to work hard to focus discussion. More direction, or leading questions, might have helped mitigate the "scatter shot" approach. Wise noted his table started with the scatter shot approach with post it notes, and then noted the connections between the topics.

It was well prepared and went beautifully. Residents enjoyed being informed and then asked for their opinions in a collegial atmosphere. Members agreed that the workshop revealed the interconnectedness of issues, and that the plan we develop must take care to reflect this. There were common discussions about: neighborhoods and making connections; agriculture and the fairgrounds; Housatonic mills. Another common theme was the need for a vibrant economy that respects small town, rural character. There was a concern that there was too much agreement, which may have meant that we reached too many people of similar backgrounds.

It was noted that although turnout was good, only a specific portion of the population attended. Evans thought that attendees were all consumers or "users" of living space, rather than the business people or "producers" in town. Phillips indicated that this forum certainly was more geared towards residents. Other portions of the population, notably Hispanics, were not represented.

### **Next Steps: Interviews, Surveys, Focus Groups**

Rembold said outreach can continue to be somewhat general by conducting focus groups in each neighborhood, using Committee members as "ward captains" as coordinators and hosts.

He also indicated the vision workshop should be followed by interviews and surveys to begin reaching out to groups who were not at the workshop. Shanahan and Ward said that questions would be needed to make this effective. Rembold said he would take the lead in crafting questions and would share them with the Committee.

He passed out a list of potential interviewees and focus groups and asked the Committee to consider who needs to be contacted, and how to involve them in the process.

Phillips said the Committee should use this list to talk to as many people as we can, and then identify cross connections and potential dialogues between groups. She indicated she would help outreach to the Hispanic community, perhaps using BRIDGE to help. She suggested taking advantage of other already established groups like Rotary and churches to encourage participation.

Committee members said upcoming outreach should capture views of second home owners and tourists also. Evans mentioned some organization that should be included on the list, including Fish and Wildlife and Housatonic Valley Association, and that the Conservation and Open Space categories on the list could be grouped together into one session.

Hankin suggested that realtors could ask customers to take a quick survey. This might be a good way to capture tourists and second home owners in particular. Rembold noted he could develop a two minute survey that could be tailored as necessary.

Merritt said surveys could be mailed out and reach a broad group of participants, but that some surveys are better done person-to-person, which also helps build relationships and supporters. She noted that Keep Farming is developing a 15 minute survey for that purpose.

### **Adjourn**

On a motion by Musgrove, seconded by Dohoney, all in favor, the meeting adjourned at 9:00 PM.

### **Next Meeting**

Thursday, August 25, at the Gilligan's, 320 State Road. Pot luck dinner at 6:00.  
The meeting will be at 7:30pm

### **Materials distributed or presented during this meeting:**

- Report from Transportation subcommittee
- Preliminary list of interviewees and focus groups (dated 9/15/2010)