

Great Barrington Master Plan Committee (MPC)

Minutes of October 27, 2011
Fire Station
37 State Road, Great Barrington

The meeting was called to order at 7:35 PM by Co-Chairperson Michael Wise. He designated Vivian Orłowski as the recording secretary, noting that Paul Ivory will serve at the next meeting.

Members present: Barbara Bailly, Ryan Caruso, Richard Dohoney, Shep Evans, Suzanne Fowle-Schroeder (Alternate, voting), Michele Gilligan, Jonathan Hankin, Mary Beth Merritt, Vivian Orłowski (Alternate, not voting), Karen Smith, Christine Ward (Alternate, not voting), Michael Wise.

Members absent: Andrew Blechman, Paul Ivory, Bill Meier, Jack Musgrove, Deborah Phillips, David Rutstein, David Shanahan

Also present: Chris Rembold, Town Planner

Minutes of September 22, 2011

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

Outreach and Engagement Activities

A. Neighborhood Forums

Rembold stated that the meetings are going very well so far. People seem very eager to participate, and there are a variety of perspectives or viewpoints represented. Five have been held to date: State Road, East Side, Housatonic, North Plain, and Castle Hill. Attendance has been good and the outreach methods—flyers, newspaper, and phone calls—have been successful. A number of other neighborhoods are scheduled for early November.

Rembold indicated there are common themes that seem to be emerging across neighborhoods, but issues specific to each neighborhood are also being expressed. He asked that members from each neighborhood share their impressions of their meetings at the next MP meeting on December 8.

Wise said he hoped the results will be published in some public way. Smith indicated that it might be useful to have a full page in the newspaper to show the results, perhaps by neighborhood or on a map. It would also be a good way to debunk any pervasive myths or unknowns.

B. Interviews and Topical Workshops

Wise asked how interviews were progressing. Rembold said a first step will be taken for Open Space issues with the GB Trails group. Historic, arts and culture, and certain interviews will be scheduled in the next month if possible.

Guest Speaker: Planning for Resilient Communities

Orłowski gave a brief introduction. Keith Zaltzberg ideas about community resilience planning. He teaches at Conway School of Landscape Design and is a Visiting Professor at Smith College. He founded the Regenerative Design, a landscape planning firm that specializes in designing “edible ecosystems” at the site specific and community scale. His associate Abrah Dresdale is an ecological designer and food

system planner. She specializes in edible landscapes and food systems and recently completed a report entitled "Feed Northampton." Visit www.issu.com/abrahmdresdale to view the report.

They discussed how communities can incorporate systems planning into the master plan, and why it is important to plan for landscapes that can adapt to larger issues like climate change and still provide the food and ecosystem services we need in our communities. Dresdale presented an overview of the Feed Northampton report which examined how food was produced, consumed, and distributed within the community. The study identified future challenges to the local food system including a decrease in local agricultural land and heavy dependence on fossil fuels. The study also addresses how local farms could produce foods for local markets, how local industry could process the food, and local hubs could distribute the food.

Zaltzberg discussed a potential prototype of a local food hub. A 170-acre farm came up for sale in Northampton and his design group was able to apply the strategies from Feed Northampton and design a master plan for the site. Three scales of systems are planned for the site, including a flood plain buffer area on the Mill River of so-called "productive conservation" (native trees and plants that will produce nuts and berries and stabilize the river area), a central area of 400 community garden spots (seven acres), as well as plots for organic farm business incubators on the land that is most suitable for annual tillage. The end result is a site that provides natural ecosystem services, income for farmers and food businesses, and food for the community.

Merritt and Orlowski indicated that the data gathered so far in the Keep Farming process will help us create similar strategies for our town. We will have an understanding of the local southern Berkshire food system, how land use and regulations are impacting it, and develop some strategies for how to foster and promote it.

Smith said this way of thinking and planning makes a great deal of sense. This type of presentation and these strategies are an excellent model for carrying our message to the community.

Wise asked how government public policy, including land use regulations, can address these strategies of mixed-use and integrated systems. Zaltzberg said government can begin the community wide discussions, but perhaps strategies they are best implemented at a smaller scale. Wise expressed his concern that typical zoning regulations might be ill-equipped, or too inflexible, to allow such novel strategies. Merritt said she hopes the dialogue begun by Keep Farming and the Master Plan will help open up our minds to flexible land use.

Other Issues and Concerns

Ethics: Wise reminded all members to fill out their Open Meetings acknowledgement and complete the online Ethics test, and print the final page. The form and the print-out are due to the Town Clerk by the end of this year.

Adjournment

After a motion by Gilligan, seconded by Merritt, the Chair adjourned the meeting at 8:50 PM.

Next Meeting

Thursday, December 8, at the Great Barrington Fire Station, 37 State Road at 7:30 PM.

Materials distributed or presented during this meeting:

- Presentation by Keith Zaltzberg and Abrah Dresdale: "Planning for Community Resilience."


Town Planner