

Great Barrington Master Plan Committee (MPC)

Minutes of May 24, 2012
Fire Station
37 State Road, Great Barrington

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 PM by Co-Chairperson Michael Wise.

Members present: Barbara Bailly, Andrew Blechman, Charles Bouteiller (Alternate voting), Ryan Caruso, Ethan Culleton, Suzanne Fowle-Schroeder (Alternate voting), Jonathan Hankin, Paul Ivory, Bill Meier, Mary Beth Merritt, Vivian Orlowski, Deborah Phillips, David Shanahan, Michael Wise
Also present: Chris Rembold (Town Planner)

Members absent: Richard Dohoney, Shep Evans, Michele Gilligan, David Rutstein, Karen W. Smith

Minutes of April 26, 2012

Hankin moved to approve as amended, seconded by Phillips, all were in favor.

Topical Workshops

The committee and audience members broke out into two tables to discuss agriculture and open space. The full committee reconvened and recorded the results of the tables. The results are below.

AGRICULTURE (Merritt reporting)

- Permanently preserve as much existing working farmland as possible, using CPA funds and land conservancy partnerships
- Revise zoning to support and protect farmland, including, for example, agricultural resource areas to require: clustering of new homes; minimum or maximum setbacks; and common driveways; and no permanent disturbance of agricultural soils.
- Evaluate overlap of prime farm soils and undeveloped industrial zones, and consider whether a rezoning away from industrial would better preserve the area for farm use. Consider whether a reduction or increase in land values would result, and the attendant impact on economic viability, cost of farming, and benefits/viability of Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) buy outs if/when land is rezoned
- Develop “agri-tourism” and hospitality industry
- Ensure zoning regulations support diverse income streams for working farms, including, for example, special events, farm restaurants, farm stands, renewable energy
- Promote community gardens and residential gardens in front and back yards, including chickens, promote Greenagers-type residential food garden programs, and community supported agriculture
- Aim for bulk of our food produced within the region. Evaluate amount of land in farm production, land available for farm production, and whether there are enough people to farm these lands. Goal of returning to times when about 6,000 acres were in production.
- Consider policies, procedures, farm-farmer land matching services, and/or incentives that would encourage more land in production and new farmers
- Promote a commercial kitchen or facilities where value can be added to farm products. Consider using churches or defunct restaurant kitchens for these food processing uses.
- Encourage a variety of farming, including tree farming, timber harvest, forage, edible forest (understory farming), nurseries, and aquaculture especially where there is clean water source
- Promote agricultural education with high schools and colleges, and integrate / partner with garden clubs and town facilities like the senior center
- Central marketing hub or market hall for retail and for commercial buyers.
- There is not yet enough local food supply to meet the local food demand.
- Housing for farmers is needed as this is an impediment for young and new farmers

- View renewable energy and farming as compatible and to be encouraged, not as competitive

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION (Rembold reporting)

- Tried not to cover items already covered by other OS planning meetings. Refer to those notes for details and vision maps
- Utilize CPA funds to accomplish long-held vision of extending River Walk South. Recognize concerns of the school at Searles' Castle and try to work with them again. Charlie's idea: if it fails, explore an alternate route on the eastern side of the river (even though it misses the important sites, like Olympia Meadows and Fairgrounds, in favor of the Log Homes and sewer plant sites). This could be an ideal use for CPA funds, if that happens.
- Formalize access to the town-owned parts of East Mountain (not including the fire district's interests around the reservoir where they have decided they will not promote public access because of concern for water quality safety)
- Spur trail from downtown to the AT should be explored
- Suggestion not to expand trails without provision for maintenance: at least, if something new is proposed (like a connection between GB and Housatonic), remember to focus on that dimension. Andrew notes that "if they build it, they will think it's neat and support keeping it up".
- Good idea: exercise equipment going into South Street park to make it multidimensional
- Signs and maps (on the website, too) should be improved: no one knows what and where parks and recreation areas are and what to do about them.
- Old Maid's should have a barbeque area again.
- Find a place for a dog park
- Catering to outdoorsy types as an economic development-tourism goal needs more attention (and better maps and signs): including hiking and canoe / kayak launching points.
- Require bike trails, sidewalks, crosswalks when any road is redone: at least look at it.
- Education and promotion; connections.
- Paul's question: is there a long-range plan to develop trails, prioritized and ready to go if funds appear? There will be such a map in the plan.
- Leverage public and private investment in the Mills, and the Fairgrounds, to accomplish trail and River access goals in those areas.
- Do not extend new trails or new parks unless maintenance funds are identified.
- Dedicate a specific percentage of town budget to maintaining parks and playgrounds
- Improve police presence at skate park and all playgrounds and parks
- Pursue Tree City designation for active tree stewardship, maintenance, planting efforts
- Promote local and regional trails to tourists, including the Appalachian Trail - prominently post GB Trails walking route, biking route, and trail route signs.
- Cross-promote hotels, restaurants and open space / recreation activities

Draft Goals and Strategies / June 21 Public Forum

Rembold presented a revised draft of the Vision and Guiding Principles document. He grouped the key principles into some meaningful or more compelling components.

He suggested that this document, plus the goals that have been developed for each statement be presented at the June 21 public forum. In the two weeks prior to that, these documents and drafts would be published in the paper and other places to generate interest and attract people to the forum. Rembold is considering having each topic at its own table. Phillips said the time allotment is tight, but there should be enough time available for attendees to get to at least two tables. Merritt suggested attendees be able to vote and prioritize each goal. There was general agreement about this approach.

Rembold will send out the draft goals for each topic by the end of the coming week, and will speak to each task force in order to hone the goals before publication. Wise noted that special care should be given to

the presentation at the forum, so that we give specifics without appearing to have already predetermined the outcomes.

Rembold invited the committee to suggest changes to the Vision Statement to him via email at their convenience.

Other Issues and Concerns

Merritt raised a concern that education should be a more prominent part of the Master Plan. Not only is it a majority of the town budget, but quality education underscores all of our economic development goals. Fowle shared her perception that the current leadership at the school is very well respected and energized, and that the extracurricular education activities available because of the efforts of the leadership. Rembold noted that the schools are branching out to include programs in property management, hospitality, and restaurants into the vo-tech curriculum. Orłowski and Blechman emphasized that while the school district has their own planning process, we should invite them into our process and to our meetings, and share our goals with them so that they can incorporate them into their planning.

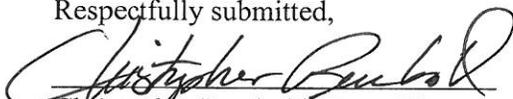
Adjournment

Hearing no further business, Wise adjourned the meeting at 9:10 PM.

Materials distributed or presented for this meeting:

- Draft Minutes of April 26, 2012
- Draft goals and strategies for agriculture
- Draft goals and strategies for open space and recreation
- Revised draft of Vision and Guiding Principles

Respectfully submitted,



Christopher Rembold, Town Planner