

Great Barrington Master Plan Committee (MPC)

Minutes of December 17, 2012
Great Barrington Fire Station

The meeting was called to order at 6:10 PM by Co-Chairperson Michael Wise.

Members present: Barbara Bailly, Andrew Blechman, Shep Evans, Michele Gilligan, Jonathan Hankin, Paul Ivory, Bill Meier, Vivian Orłowski, Deborah Phillips, David Shanahan, and Michael Wise. Also present was Chris Rembold (Town Planner).

Members absent: Charles Bouteiller, Ryan Caruso, Ethan Culleton, Richard Dohoney, Suzanne Fowle (alternate), David Rutstein.

Minutes of October 25, 2012

The minutes were approved without objection.

Draft Land Use chapter

Rembold noted that a Land Use plan is a required component per the Massachusetts General Law governing master plans. He presented the draft Land Use chapter, reviewing historical patterns, existing uses, and development trends. The draft includes discussion and map of priority conservation areas (updated from the open space plan presented last meeting) and possible development areas.

The Committee suggested that some consideration be given to a larger map size, so that details and legends are easier to read. The document must be legible and readable.

Rembold said the priority conservation area map shows land that is not currently protected and that has significant ecological value (as identified by Bio Map and CAPS maps produced by the state), and scenic value (as identified by participants in this plan). These are the areas the town wants to focus its conservation efforts and funds on protecting. Evans noted that Three Mile Hill is not on the Bio Map or CAPS map but participants have expressed that it is a scenic resource.

Hankin asked how the priority conservation areas map interacts with agricultural land. Many of the areas on the map have prime agricultural soils. Rembold indicated the text currently states that development could occur in these areas, but measures must be taken to encourage it to be done sensitively. In the case of agricultural soils, sensitive site planning would avoid farmable areas. Orłowski noted agriculture could mean many different things—intensive crop production or more sensitive farming practices. Hankin asked that the map be revised to also show those areas that are already protected.

In the build out discussion, Rembold noted that sites like the New England Log Homes and the Monument Mills are not indicated on the map as buildable only because they already have buildings on them (or recently did). However these are precisely the areas where we have agreed that development should be concentrated. The Committee agreed that this discussion should be strengthened in the text.

Land use and tax base was discussed. The town is a heavily property tax dependent community, and most of that burden falls on residential property owners. Rembold noted that as land is protected or its tax revenue is otherwise reduced, the property tax burden shifts even more to the rest of the tax payers. Rembold suggested the Committee might review the priority conservation and development maps with this tax base information in mind. This is an important part of the balancing act the town must play when considering development and protection. Wise pointed out the \$700,000 of tax revenue that is forgone

through the Chapter program is a ballpark estimate of how much the town is paying to preserve amenities such as open space, farmland, and so on.

A draft Land Use vision map was discussed. It indicates areas throughout town for zoning changes, conservation, development, infill development and redevelopment. It includes suggestions for downtown, Housatonic, the Route 7 Corridor, neighborhoods and gateways. There was discussion of potential zoning changes to reflect the land use vision. Meier asked whether these new zoning suggestions were in reaction to recent market trends and proposals. Rembold said yes, in part. The suggestions reflect the desire for more and varied housing options nearer to downtown and established centers, in more walkable locations, mixed-uses as ways to make redevelopment more financially feasible, and no foreseeable market for industrial development, for example.

Rembold asked members to review the draft, and the conservation, development, and land use vision map in particular. More discussion can be held at the next meeting in January.

Outreach

There was a brief discussion of outreach activities for the coming several months. Rembold handed out the revised outreach / interview list. Rembold will contact Committee members to establish interview times, to occur later in January and February. These interviews or meetings are intended to be overviews of the drafts, fact checking / making sure we have everything correct and we are not missing significant pieces of information from the topical areas. All agreed.

All agreed to invite the school district to attend a Committee meeting so that we can discuss future planning together. Rembold will set this up for some time in the coming months.

Other Issues and Concerns

The Committee decided to meet twice in January, on January 8 at 6:00 and also on January 24 at 7:30. Both meetings will be at the Fire Station.

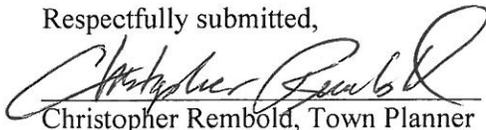
Adjournment

Hearing no further business, Wise adjourned the meeting at 8:05 PM.

Materials distributed or presented for this meeting:

- Draft Minutes of October 25, 2012
- Revised Draft Natural Resources, Open Space, Recreation
- Draft Land Use chapter including maps

Respectfully submitted,



Christopher Rembold, Town Planner