

Great Barrington Master Plan Committee (MPC)

Minutes of February 28, 2013
Great Barrington Fire Station

The meeting was called to order at 7:35 PM by Co-Chairperson Michael Wise.

Members present: Barbara Bailly, Andrew Blechman, Charles Bouteiller, Ryan Caruso, Shep Evans, Jonathan Hankin, Bill Meier, Vivian Orlowski, David Rutstein (voting alternate), David Shanahan and Michael Wise. Also present was Chris Rembold, Town Planner.

Members absent: Ethan Culleton, Richard Dohoney, Suzanne Fowle (alternate), Michele Gilligan, Paul Ivory, Deborah Phillips.

Minutes of February 7, 2013

Rembold pointed out an error in the Transportation draft: the mileage of the roads on which the Town performs winter maintenance is incorrect. Some segments are shorter than reported. Rembold will revisit the figures.

Hankin moved to approve the draft minutes; Evans seconded. All were in favor.

Draft Energy and Climate chapter

Hankin asked about commercial scale wind turbines. Rembold said our wind resource areas are all in protected areas. It was noted that permanent protections of state forests may someday be revisited if development pressures are strong enough or there is a major energy crisis. There was a discussion that small, residential-scale or rooftop wind energy could be viable. Orlowski suggested that permitting process needs to consider potential health impacts from vibration and shadow-flicker, and impacts on property values, no matter the scale of the installation. Hankin said since all wind turbine installations are governed by Special Permits through zoning, the special permit process is the appropriate time to consider these potential impacts.

Blechman was disappointed to learn that small scale hydroelectric was infeasible. He suggested that the draft not preclude the future possibility of such installations.

Evans asked that the climate section discuss the importance of wetlands and riparian zones (buffer areas) along rivers and streams. Intact buffer zones provide shade and cooler waters that are vital habitat, even more so as the climate warms. The Wetlands Protection Act governs changes in these areas, but does not require improvements, like replanting, in buffer zones. The Town should be proactive in working with landowners to improve buffer zones.

Evans also noted that new regulations for culverts and stream crossings will require that habitat connectivity be maintained. The crossings will also need to be wider to ensure they are able to handle the water volumes of larger storm events. This is both a climate change and an infrastructure issue.

There was a good deal of discussion about solar installations and draft goal EN 3. Hankin reminded the Committee that current state law says that solar, at any scale, cannot be unreasonably regulated. Bouteiller said that we should not overregulate solar energy, if we care about the planet more than about the views from window. Meier agreed that solar should not be overregulated. Rembold said the draft includes a suggestion of how to reasonably regulate solar in Great Barrington. Hankin said the Town will end up in court if we require a special permit for solar. A discretionary permit is the same as saying no. Rembold responded saying this suggested language was developed based on what the sample regulations the State

has promulgated, what the Committee has heard from the public, and based on what is reasonable under the state law.

Evans asked that the draft chapter include examples to help visualize the size of solar installations, at least at current efficiencies. For example, 1 megawatt of power requires 5 acres of panel surface and up to 20 acres of land. Rembold said he would include this.

Orlowski asked about promoting conservation and energy efficiency. The Committee thought goal EN 1 addressed this. Orlowski said that rooftop solar should be encouraged because it can power the home directly. Systems that are tied into the grid and transport energy long distances lose energy in transmission and are also vulnerable to grid disruptions. Rembold reminded the Committee that because solar is by right under state law, rooftop solar can be accomplished easily. He will add a brief discussion about rooftop solar in the draft.

Hankin suggested that the Town not tax rooftop, small-scale solar panels. This would be an incentive to rooftop solar. Rembold said he is unsure of how they are currently assessed and he will look into the issue.

Rembold asked Hankin to review the draft strategies and to consider if they are reasonable or unreasonable ways to regulate solar.

Wise said energy conservation and historic preservation are intertwined and we should be aware of potential tradeoffs. We have wonderful old homes that are part of our character but not energy efficient. He wondered if the most energy efficient course of action would be to demolish old homes and replace them with energy efficiency homes.

Draft Services and Facilities chapter

Hankin was concerned that the chapter is far too long. The encyclopedic approach to existing conditions is good research but the plan should be streamlined and accessible. He suggested this information should be removed to an appendix. Rembold said he will streamline the chapters for the final draft.

Rembold gave a brief overview of the chapter. He said when towns approach a master plan and their population is increasing, they are facing service needs and the need to build new schools, wastewater plants, find new water supplies, and build new roads. Twenty years ago this is what concerned the town when the master plan projected growth. Today, instead of spending large amounts of money building new facilities to meet the needs of our population, we have the opposite case. Our challenge is that we need to spend large amounts of capital to modernize and repair our existing infrastructure, and/or reduce the amount of infrastructure, like surplus buildings, that we have.

Rembold noted the draft has a pro-preservation stance for Ramsdell library. It also takes a pro-renovation stance regarding the High School.

Hankin said he thought the sale of the former Searles school reserved a certain amount of space for town office or storage space. Rembold said does not think the space was reserved when the sale agreement was made. Wise said we must consider the cost of keeping a rent-free space in a town building versus the cost of renting space from someone.

The Committee decided to discuss this chapter in more detail on March 28.

Other Issues and Concerns

Rembold said he would deliver the Agriculture chapter to an early meeting in March. The Committee agreed to meet on Thursday, March 14 at 7:30, if the Agricultural Commission chairman can attend.

The regular meeting will be as usual on March 28 at 7:30.

Both meetings will be at the Fire Station.

An Implementation chapter is still needed. The chapter will be a five-year timeline on which all of the goals are compiled and responsibilities are assigned. Rembold will deliver it on the 28th.

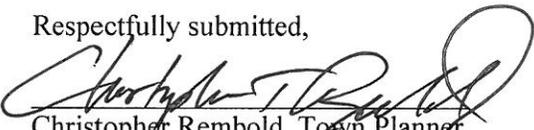
Adjournment

Hearing no further business, Wise adjourned the meeting at 9:00 PM.

Materials distributed or presented at this meeting:

- Draft Minutes of February 7, 2013
- Draft Energy and Climate chapter
- Draft Services and Facilities chapter

Respectfully submitted,



Christopher Rembold, Town Planner

