

**MINUTES**

**PLANNING BOARD  
WORK SESSION**

**PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE**

**CITY HALL, MUNICIPAL COMPLEX, 1 JUNKINS AVENUE**

**7:00 P.M.**

**MARCH 31, 2016**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** John Ricci, Chairman; Elizabeth Moreau, Vice Chairman; David Allen, Deputy City Manager; David Moore, Assistant City Manager; William Gladhill; Colby Gamester; Jay Leduc; Dexter Legg and Jody Record, Alternate

**ALSO PRESENT:** Rick Taintor, Planning Director; Jessa Berna, Associate Planner

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Rebecca Perkins, City Council Representative

.....  
**I. MASTER PLAN**

**A. Review Draft Master Plan**

Mr. Taintor said this was the first opportunity to see all sections of the full Master Plan, which included the themes, goals, focus areas and structure of the plan. He said this was the first full draft, they would be doing more work, and there would be an opportunity for the Planning Board to have early input. Mr. Taintor described the schedule, saying they would develop a public participation process that would be in May and June, so there would be a review period of public input before the start of the summer. Following that, the draft would be revised based on input received. On May 26<sup>th</sup>, there was another PB work session scheduled, but that could move into June. He said they expected to have the final draft of the Master Plan submitted to the Planning Board for final review in September or October, and they would then present the Master Plan to the City Council in November.

Alan Mountjoy and Chris Herlich of NBBJ, the consultants who submitted the draft Master Plan gave a brief introduction to the plan.

Mr. Mountjoy said they had been working on the Master Plan for a year. They were informed by Portsmouth Listens and the kickoff meeting and workshops, which were listed in the Master Plan introduction. They also gathered information from the various community groups they had met with. He added that this draft would be revised after the spring public input process.

This was a complete draft with a format that was different than previous Master Plan formats. They felt it was important to identify important themes. He said that the "Connected" theme included transportation, as well as parks, instead of thinking of these things separately.

Mr. Mountjoy described a section on focus areas, saying that while themes, actions and goals were important, it was also important to see how the themes would be realized within a typology. The five focus areas were areas either in transition, or areas that may be impacted by implementation of the Master Plan. The five Master Plan focus areas were Urban Core, Corridor, Urban Neighborhood, Suburban Neighborhood and Parks & Open Space.

He walked the Planning Board through the document briefly, saying they hoped to initially receive broad comments that night from the Planning Board, then later more specific comments via edited drafts in writing, at which time corrections and typos could be addressed. He added that nothing was cast in stone, but there existed in the first draft a very good framework.

The five planning themes of Vibrant, Authentic, Diverse, Connected and Resilient mostly came out of Portsmouth Listens. Each of the Planning Themes sections in the Master Plan began with a broad statement, followed by a series of specific goals for that theme. For each goal there was a Priority Action. The Diversity theme goals included talk regarding housing needs. He said that Resiliency was also about conservation, and included preparation for potential changes to climate and sea level rise.

The Focus Areas were a way that made it easier for residents to engage with the ideas presented in the Master Plan. He stated that each focus area in the Master Plan included a map and documentation, but the focus areas did not include Pease.

Each of the sections had Priority Actions, and how those might affect a focus area. He said they worked on the corridors (i.e., the gateways to the areas), and much of that was taken from community engagement, for example, making Route 1 more pedestrian friendly, and making it easier to get to some business without having to drive. This section talked about the kind of development that would be beneficial when development proceeded in the future.

He said they addressed the questions of how existing neighborhoods could play a role in housing, and how might they accommodate additional housing, and they illustrated ways that housing could be accommodated in the Master Plan.

They were in the process of identifying additional features to help preserve neighborhood character for the suburban neighborhoods. He added there were a lot of issues on how to better connect neighborhoods to the commercial corridors, saying that the open space in the City was not easily accessible by the residents, and it was not always well maintained. Residents would like to see better connections to the open spaces, without having to travel on the main corridors.

Mr. Mountjoy said the Implementation Section of the Master Plan went back to the state mandated way of organizing a master plan.

Chairman Ricci asked for questions.

Vice Chairman Moreau said there were two sections that seemed identical. On pages 9 and 10, the Natural Resources and the Climate Change sections seemed repetitive, and she asked if they can be combined.

Mr. Legg said he loved the format, the structure and the focus areas. But, he said under the Vibrant theme, the first goal seemed to strike the wrong tone, and it was not consistent with the text and write-up of the theme. He suggested not eliminating the goal, but not leading with it either. Instead, he suggested they add a goal that captured mixed use within the urban core, maybe changing from downtown to urban core.

Jay Leduc also liked the format, but said he had a hard time understanding some of the comparisons. He suggested it would be helpful, for instance, to make comparisons to some model city when talking about amounts of bike lanes, i.e. benchmarking to see where Portsmouth actually was. In some places there were statistics, which he really liked, and it was good to see where they were exceeding and where they were lacking, comparatively. He was not sure which city they would use as a comparative city. Mr. Legg added that this would also make it easier for the Planning Board to see where they needed to focus.

Mr. Leduc asked how the Master Plan would get transitioned to the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) once the Master Plan was finalized. Mr. Taintor answered that last time, they did a comprehensive revision of the zoning ordinance. That would be one way, with direction from the Planning Board. Additionally, they would look at how to guide the CIP, for instance, referencing certain planning documents within the CIP, which would provide a cross-reference to the Master Plan.

Chairman Ricci said it would help residents to see how something got prioritized.

Mr. Allen asked if there a way to use metrics for infrastructure, for instance pertaining to the protection of watershed areas, adding that it would be nice to put a measurable characteristic behind some of these. Mr. Mountjoy answered that metrics could be problematic as sometimes it was hard to get really good data. He said they had tried to use data that was readily available. They didn't want to create more work for the City, so they wanted to use what the City already tracked. Mr. Herlich of NBBJ added that they were putting together a list of desirable metrics that would be helpful to have. Mr. Allen asked where that would be included. Mr. Mountjoy said that the intention was to work with staff so as to not create extra work for them. Mr. Herlich said the metrics would apply to measuring goals, but would not get down to the Priority Action Areas levels. He said they would be included under the theme sections for each goal. Mr. Taintor said there were different levels of metrics, and said they can track watershed protection because of GIS systems.

Mr. Allen said it would be good to let people know how to find that data. He said a priority sitting by itself would raise a question as to whether anything was being done to address that priority, and it would be important to be able to see where it was needed to go further on that priority.

Mr. Mountjoy said they had used the Existing Conditions Report.

Chairman Ricci said the City anniversary was coming up in 2025, and asked if any anniversary events would tie in to the Master Plan, and should they. Would there be a place for that anniversary in the Master Plan, he asked. Mr. Mountjoy answered it did not come up in any conversation, but he noted it.

Mr. Moore said he would like to follow up on the specifics from the effectiveness and helpfulness of the 2005 Master Plan. The waterfront, the parks and wayfinding were given a huge priority in the

2005 discussions, the bi-ped plan and the PULA assessment. This information would be important in trying to navigate to how proceed with this.

Vice Chairman Moreau said she loved the format, but some of the headings needed to be placed in bold. Chairman Ricci agreed and added that graphics made a document readable

Mr. Legg said the Section 5.5 priorities were the same as the Section 5.3 priorities, on pages 62 and 60, and he was not sure if that was intentional. Mr. Mountjoy said they could just combine them, but that may be an error.

Mr. Legg said under Vibrant, he would like a more recent data point than 2010, for the number of kids participating in events. Mr. Mountjoy said some of it was taken from census data.

Mr. Legg suggested under Vibrant, they change opportunity for “Living, Work and Playing”, to “Living, Working and Playing”.

Mr. Moore said the themes really fit. He noted how much universal agreement there was so early in the process. He said he had many edits for the Master Plan, and Ms. Berna suggested he give them to her, as that would be the best way to channel grammatical comments.

Mr. Moore commented on the Master Plan organization. The section on the review of prior plans was useful, but he would suggest “categories” by topic area, as that would make it more readable. Also, it would be helpful to point the public back to the process that was followed. In the introduction, there were comments about that, but he would like to see pictures added to that section as well.

Mr. Moore suggested that some of the West End comments the Planning Board received at the March 17, 2016 Planning Board meeting, be included in the Master Plan. He cautioned they be careful to recognize the difference between the Downtown and the West End, because they were asked to do that by Portsmouth Listens.

Mr. Mountjoy said they did collect a lot of information, and they had lots of material to document the public engagement process.

Mr. Moore said he didn’t care for lengthy appendices and he was not sure they would be effective for a legacy document.

Mr. Legg said it would be easy to point someone to a document from the City website, and Mr. Mountjoy said the document would be available on the website.

Mr. Gladhill said the format was good, and was an easy read. There were a lot of goals, but no path in how to get to those goals, and he asked if it was supposed to be open-ended. He added that if it were to be open-ended, a goal might get pushed to the side. Where was the plan to get there, he asked.

Mr. Taintor said they talked about the level of detail to be included. They would get to that in the last section in the implementation plan, which had relevant departments and timeframes, which is what

they did in 2005. For some of the items, there might be sub-actions. They would figure out from there how to implement the goals.

Ms. Record said there were some emotionally charged issues in the Master Plan, like addressing climate change. Some people didn't believe that was real, so how would they implement that. She was in one of the Portsmouth Listens circles and said people were very passionate on these issues.

Mr. Gladhill said climate change was a hard challenge for a city of 20,000. Mr. Mountjoy said some metrics might help in setting goals if the City were to set a target. Mr. Gladhill added that sea level rise preparation was a very complicated situation and was not something they could achieve by themselves. Ms. Record agreed.

Chairman Ricci said they should make realistic goals. It would be nice to set goals that were not open ended, for example, increasing recycling in the City by 20%, or increasing bike paths by 15%.

Mr. Mountjoy said their goal was to go back to the City departments to determine what they felt comfortable with for the setting of the goals. If it was to be included in the Master Plan, it would have to be done with the City departments. Chairman Ricci added there were always extremely knowledgeable experts in the City that could comment on the specifics of the goals to help in keeping them realistic.

Mr. Legg asked when they should have all that determined. It would be important they make sure they had the right goals before building up the metrics. He agreed that resident experts could help them to determine goals. By the time the Master Plan was final, these would be better defined.

Mr. Gladhill suggested increasing recycling by partitioning trash bins in parks to separate recycles from trash.

Mr. Gladhill asked if there would be a work session to delve into the details of the individual goals since that night they were talking broadly. Chairman Ricci agreed that would be a good idea. Sometimes it was a good way for people think about it over time. It was important to have goals that were achievable.

Mr. Mountjoy said it was in the nature of Master Plans that not all items were implemented. However, if used as a blueprint, it was a valuable tool.

Mr. Gladhill said some of them were great ideas, but he was not sure how they were all enforceable. Mr. Leduc said the departments would reference those items for enforcing.

Mr. Legg said this was a Master Plan over a 10 year or more life cycle, and they couldn't at that time say with certainty that these would be the priorities the City would focus on in maybe seven years. It was also a vision statement. He said they needed to be careful if they set metrics, that it be for only the priorities that were most important.

Mr. Taintor recalled an example action from the 2005 Master Plan which did not now make sense, so it was preferable to not document down to a very specific level, so as to enable flexibility with different

directions in order to achieve a goal. He said that at the Portsmouth Smart Growth for the 21st Century (PS21) event, he was asked to speak for one minute on the Master Plan. He was able to achieve that by stating the themes included in the Master Plan.

Chairman Ricci said he loved the graphics, and the document was easy to read and thumb through.

Mr. Taintor asked about Mr. Gladhill's suggestion for more focus groups to discuss the Master Plan detail, and Mr. Moore agreed that would be a great idea.

Chairman Ricci asked if a 6:00-7:00 work session prior to a Planning Board meeting would that be good.

Mr. Allen asked if it would be beneficial to obtain public input before the detailed work sessions. Mr. Taintor answered that what would be rolled out to the public would not be very different from the current draft, so he said they could start now and overlap with the public process.

Mr. Taintor said another work session was planned for April 14, 2016.

.....

**VII. ADJOURNMENT**

A motion to adjourn at 8:20 was made and seconded and passed unanimously.

.....

Respectfully Submitted,

Marian Steimke  
Acting Secretary for the Planning Board

These minutes were approved at the April 21, 2016 Planning Board Meeting.