

Master Plan Committee Minutes - July 26, 2006

TOWN OF LINCOLN

MASTER PLAN COMMITTEE MINUTES

July 26, 2006

ATTENDANCE:

Jody Kablack	Sudbury Town Planner
Larry O'Brien	Sudbury Selectman
Ken Hurd	Planning Board
Mark Whitehead	Town Planner
Bob Sutherland	Council on Aging
Gez Morse	COA
Mary Sheldon	COA
Paul Giese	Finance Committee
Sarah Cannon Holden	Board of Selectmen
Chris Klem	'At large' member
Craig Donaldson	Community Preservation Committee
Astrid Glynn	'At large' member
Angela Seaborg	Conservation Planner
Peter Von Mertens	Conservation Commission
Buck Creel	Water Commission
Anita Scheipers	Assistant Town Administrator
David Reece	'At large' member
Andy Bennett	10 Bedford Lane
Catherine Perry	Planning Admin.

PRESENTATION BY SUDBURY MASTER PLAN MEMBERS

Introduction

Ken Hurd introduced Jody Kablack and Larry O'Brien from Sudbury's Master Plan team, who had kindly offered to talk about their experiences developing and implementing their plan. Ms. Kablack has been Sudbury's Planner for 15 years and Mr. O'Brien is a third term Selectman who was on the Planning Board when the Master Plan was developed.

Mark Whitehead asked the speakers to try to address three key parts of the process:

1. Why and how: what triggered the need for a plan and how did they set about it?
2. The preparation process: what worked and what didn't?
3. Implementation: how is it going, and are there any plans to redo or update the plan?

Presentation

The Sudbury representatives explained that their plan was conceived at a time of rapid change. Growth was occurring and the Town had just hired a Town Manager. Developers were building large houses on one acre lots, and some attempts at spot zoning caused controversy. Big school capacity issues were emerging. The previous plan was several decades old.

In the early stages, the Town used a consultant, John Mullin, and involved a large, diverse group of residents: 75 people, of whom 28 were official committee members. They looked to Lincoln's example for ideas on conservation issues.

An early task was to develop a character statement. This incorporated the results of widespread consultation, employing visual materials. A SWOT/GOP analysis was conducted, to build consensus on the issues. There was an educational element in this process, teaching people about the interrelation of issues, and about powers available. The focus was on identifying common ground where action could be agreed upon. Rules were established to govern discussions (no negativity!). The results were reported to Town Meeting for a non-binding resolution.

After this, task forces were set up to work on particular topics. The starting point for these was not the Mass General Laws definition of Master Plan work, but they fitted the required elements quite well. There was also a writing group.

Cable TV was used to publicize work on the plan. Wide involvement was invited, and an attempt was made to address likely objectors' concerns early on.

The plan document was written in-house. There were many consultations with Boards along the way, and also public meetings. Compared to a consultant-written plan, this was probably slower but developed more support. Proposals for change were introduced first in terms of goals rather than specific actions.

An important component of the work was a town-wide opinion survey, which achieved a 25% response (1500/6000).

The Sudbury planners provided two handouts for the audience:

- Strategic Planning Committee: charge, early list of issues, ground rules, media proposals;
- "New Directions for Sudbury – A Framework for Action", 1997.

Discussion

Q. Did involvement stay high?

A. Yes, though a few people dropped out. There was a good mix of people, representing different groups.

Q. What was the consultant's background?

A. Planning, plus military experience. A UMASS professor, with a great deal of enthusiasm, and ability to steer discussions. He was also useful in providing a check on whether the goals and aims identified were reasonable.

Q. Was the process aimed at reaching certain solutions?

A. Partly, in that it was anticipated that the new Community Preservation Act would provide a mechanism for funding some actions; but other issues also emerged from the grass roots, for example a desire to create a wider range of housing. Problems were known to exist with the old bylaw, and an attorney identified parts that were obsolete or in conflict with other parts.

Q. What was the balance between the general and the specific?

A. A mix. Ongoing bylaw changes were specific, but some topics called for further study, and some suggestions would have to await funding. Mostly, the plan was kept at a broad level, for example it might say that the sign bylaw should be revised. The implementation section categorizes proposals according to what stage they are at, as well as which Board takes the lead responsibility. 50% of proposals have been implemented or are being actively worked on. Grant funding will be useful to progress some. Jody's role has been widened to embrace community development so she helps to coordinate implementation. An Agriculture Commission has been formed to follow through on some issues identified in the plan. Some issues that have arisen since were not fully addressed, for example the rail trail.

Q. How was the format chosen?

A. It was based on Hopkinton's, with goals and objectives.

Q. What lessons have been learned along the way?

A. Attention may have been too focused on the problems presented by growth (because of the pace of development and pressure on the schools). Some opportunities to harness commercial growth to address revenue issues may have been missed. The Town is now doing an add-on exercise in relation to Route 20. Town Meeting funding for a water study is fundamental to this.

Q. Can you provide more detail on the working group process?

A. A large number of people applied to be on the Strategic Planning Group, so a sub-set was appointed but monthly meetings were kept open to embrace the wider group. The initial group lasted for about 7 months. Written documents

were produced along the way so that people had something to take home, to maintain progress. The task forces that were then established varied in size, and membership was based on interest. All except Jody were volunteers but some brought useful skills to work on publicity. A Steering Committee helped to ensure balance. This second stage lasted about a year. Press articles and a cable TV show were used to publicize the groups' work and disseminate information learned and analyzed. Mr. O'Brien's sales expertise was valuable.

Q. How was the plan presented to Town Meeting?

A. It was primarily taken to individual Boards instead. The character statement or vision was presented to Town Meeting for a non-binding resolution. Particular proposals were approved or amended by Boards, and if necessary, articles supported for Town Meeting. The Board of Selectmen had involvement in commercial sites, so some proposals needed their approval. The Conservation Commission had a lot to gain from a plan. There is currently no requirement to obtain direct Town Meeting approval of a plan. Sudbury's Master plan seems to have gained widespread acceptance and is now often quoted in support of proposals. The high level of public involvement early on probably helped.

In discussion of the Lincoln situation, it was mentioned that the launch of the process has already been presented to Town Meeting; that some people are feeling it is time for a new planning exercise; that the smaller size of the town may make a difference; that the existing use of the Conservation Commission's open space plan may provide a basis for some support at the start; and that some of the issues Lincoln hopes to touch on, such as town government and budgetary issues, may need Town Meeting approval.

Q. Did schools and churches get involved in plan preparation?

A. Not much, though the Sudbury Foundation provided some funding.

Q. Will the scope of the plan be expanded in future?

A. Probably.

Mr. Hurd thanked Ms. Kablack and Mr. O'Brien for giving up their time to give an informative presentation and helpful discussion.

NEXT MEETING

This will be on August 8 at 7:30pm in the Donaldson Room, Lincoln town offices.

Submitted by Catherine Perry.