

TOWN OF LINCOLN
MINUTES OF COMPREHENSIVE LONG RANGE PLAN COMMITTEE
October 10, 2006

ATTENDANCE:

Ken Hurd	Planning Board
Mark Whitehead	Town Planner
Tim Higgins	Town Administrator
Anita Scheipers	Assistant T.A.
Paul Giese	Finance Committee
Sarah Cannon Holden	Selectman
Angela Seaborg	Conservation Planner
Ken Bassett	Rural Land Foundation
Anna Hardman	Zoning Board of Appeals
Bryce Wolf	Planning Board
John Snell	Planning Board
Sharon Antia	School Committee
Chris Klem	'At large' member
Astrid Glynn	'At large' member
Jonathan Hoch	149 Tower Road
David Reece	'At large' member
Ben Horne	Conservation Commission
Craig Donaldson	Community Preservation Committee
Colin Smith	Historic District / Historical Commission
Fez Morse	Council on Aging
Catherine Perry	Planning Admin.

ROLE OF CONSULTANTS IN MASTER PLANNING – DISCUSSION WITH JUDY BARRETT

Ken Hurd introduced Judy Barrett of Community Opportunities Group, in Boston. Mr. Hurd mentioned that the Planning Board had some questions about the role and cost of a consultant. As a decision was needed on what to propose to Town Meeting, Ms. Barrett had been invited to help explore the issues. Mr. Higgins reminded the Committee that Ms. Barrett was the consultant who was previously hired to look at the 'At Risk Properties'. She has worked on master plans in ten communities, and with her knowledge of the town she is well placed to address questions on the process and potential use of consultants.

Ms. Barrett gave a Power Point presentation covering the following aspects:

Does a Master Plan help?

Yes – it can help to: integrate information and use it; identify new issues; discuss and form images of the past and present situation; provide a transparent process, and a rational basis for action.

Purpose

To guide physical evolution; take a look at information and develop understanding; set a structured process; avoid making decisions in a vacuum.

End results

A plan can overcome changes in personnel; set out information for wide use; explore tradeoffs; develop new active participation in town government.

Is a Master Plan required?

Ch. 41 Sec D ‘directs’ the Planning Board to prepare a plan, but as yet there is no requirement for zoning to be consistent with it; sometimes it affects grant eligibility; it can help defend against appeal of a comprehensive permit.

Do all towns have them?

No, but most do; several are currently updating their plans.

Planning resources

Mainly town people – citizens, staff and non profit organizations; regional organizations and consultants can assist.

The community

Some towns prepare plans almost all in house; others the converse. Factors are: time and abilities; level of cooperation; objectivity.

Regional and State resources

MAPC, MAGIC, Boston MPO and the Charles River Watershed Association have some information resources available.

‘What is the region?’ - affected by: new views of transportation; State/ local relations (e.g. dismantling of counties); establishment of regional planning bodies; the environmental movement (e.g. watersheds); suburban growth; civil defense and emergency planning units.

Consultants

Range of services: full plan or specific elements; technical advisors; meeting facilitators; visioning and goals; geographic information systems; sole consultant or team of two or more.

RFP

Consultants need to know:

- Scope, tasks, deliverables, schedule, number of meetings;
- Budget, timeframe and any printing or similar costs to be covered;
- Project organization;
- Selection process/ criteria.

Special features of Lincoln

All towns are different in terms of land use and organization. Lincoln is unique.

Unusual land use characteristics: extent of open space; little standard suburban housing; interesting mansions and postwar housing; narrow roads but trail network; concealed private properties set in woodland; retention of housing mix from 60s/70s developments. Aerial photo views show: much water, in complex pattern (3 watersheds); transportation and links to wider region (which underlies the economy).

An examination of open space shows: the large area and network; still significant scope for change in residential and undeveloped land.

Ms. Barrett led a discussion on Lincoln’s aims, process and key issues. Some issues mentioned were: diversity; how to stem demolition of smaller homes; and smart growth at Lincoln Station. Sarah Cannon Holden asked how much the plan needed to be physical. Ms. Barrett said that this is the planners’ starting basis, but some issues raised

will connect to other areas e.g. fiscal, so they are also looked at; the product coordinates things. Mr. Higgins mentioned that the Committee has identified a need to address tradeoffs between competing interests. Ken Bassett asked about the best approach to public participation. Ms. Barrett suggested encouraging the public to talk and not fill meetings with presenting information. It can be helpful to set questions for discussion or ask the meeting to think creatively about a problem, within constraints. If a consultant leads meetings, they should be aware of what the town government is doing, but listen to the general public to see if they have different ideas. The best way to expand involvement is for committee members to call people about upcoming meetings. A variety of meeting formats can help: night or weekend citizen planning events; daytime forums; meetings with local organizations; and opportunities for school age children to participate.

Turning to roles and workload, Ms. Barrett advised the Committee that for the elements where it wishes to have a major role, it should identify what can be done in house, and whether there are places where help is needed; what the staff will do (considering workloads); and what the consultant should do in support.

Budget considerations were discussed. The cost of consultants depends on: the schedule; division of labor; meetings; phasing; and deliverables (types, format, quantity). Ms. Barrett provided two example budget estimates:

1. Assuming one year of work with a range of involvement in different elements (\$3,500-7,500 each).....total \$75,900
2. Assuming 12-15 months' work, mostly done by consultant but with policy decisions by Committee.....total \$123,100.

The issue of phasing was discussed. Ms. Barrett advised that Phase 1 usually includes community meetings, and works to establish the goals and vision statement, and possibly principles. It is best if it also includes some reconnaissance by the consultant and an issues list, as a firm basis on which to develop the plan. Establishing the facts provides a reality check on the vision. A realistic timeframe is 6-9 months, with Lincoln probably at the longer end of the range. This normally comprises about half the total work on the plan. Goals are kept broad until the second phase. Some forecasting may be done during this first phase, including use of work already being done e.g. by school.

The Committee discussed whether it was risky to divide the funding into phases, and concluded it preferable to fund the whole process but to use phasing as a control mechanism.

Mr. Hurd thanked Ms. Barrett for a useful presentation and discussion.

DISCUSSION OF SPECIAL TOWN MEETING FUNDING ARTICLE

Mr. Whitehead distributed copies of a note produced by the Working Group for an RFP scope. This set out the group's suggestions for what a consultant could be asked to do, both in relation to the logistics of the process and in relation to the elements of the plan.

Mr. Higgins asked how the Committee now felt about the general idea of using a consultant, and whether Judy Barrett's presentation had helped.

The amount of work that could be done in house was discussed. It was generally agreed that there were good skills but a limited amount of available time. Some work

being done already could feed in. It was agreed that a coordinator/ facilitator would be useful.

Mr. Higgins said that the plan preparation process has been discussed as a two year process and he thought the town would support funding a consultant for that period at a cost of \$90-100,000 if it was explained that this is consistent with other towns. Mrs. Cannon Holden and Mrs. Wolf said they still had some concerns about people perceiving the benefits as nebulous. Other Committee members felt it was important to ask for the funding now and discussed how the benefits could be presented in a tangible way – perhaps by pointing to the benefits of the ‘At Risk Properties’ work in dealing with subsequent development proposals, or by stressing the plan’s role as a vehicle for public involvement and accountability. Astrid Glynn asked whether alternative sources of funding had been investigated; Mr. Higgins confirmed that this was the case and that none had been found to be available. Anna Hardman suggested seeking more participants, but Mr. Whitehead thought this would be more useful at a later stage. There was general agreement in the Committee that a consultant was needed.

The question of breaking the work into two phases was discussed. Paul Giese stated that the Finance Committee had envisaged a less expensive Phase 1, at around \$20,000, with the anticipation of a larger amount for Phase 2, say \$75,000, to be firmed up during the first phase. Some Committee members felt it would be better to ask for the whole of the funding at the outset. Mr. Giese said that the Finance Committee was not able to support the total request now, and therefore such a request would have to be made in March rather than November.

Mr. Whitehead considered that consultants would want to know the whole budget, and that a single RFP would be better, even if part of it was subject to a Town Meeting vote in Spring.

After some discussion, it was agreed to pass over the Article at the Special Town Meeting and aim to prepare a case for full funding in March. In the meantime, it was considered important to maintain momentum, preferably with a small amount of funding from existing sources for consultants to assist with some of the meetings.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:20pm.

Submitted by Catherine Perry