

Master Plan Advisory Committee—Survey Committee
November 23, 2010, 5:00 P.M.
Durham Town Hall—Council Chambers

— MINUTES —

Members present: Amy Cunningham [Parks & Recreation], Joe Moore [citizen], Molly Donovan [citizen], Robin Mower [Conservation; Energy, alternate], Neal Ferris [Integrated Waste Management Advisory], Lorne Parnell [Planning Board], Ute Luxem [Economic Development, alternate], Jim Lawson [Economic Development, alternate]

Members absent: Jim Campbell, Charles Forcey [Energy]

Others present: Charlie French, UNH Cooperative Extension

Meeting convened at 5:10pm

French recapped the process, noting that the committee could choose to start with a template or start from scratch. The former option takes longer, of course. The committee had chosen the former but is reconsidering the latter.

Lawson noted that he had reviewed the Newport survey and concluded that it cannot be used as a template for Durham, primarily because Durham's demographics are unique for its size. He expressed concern that without a template, a quality product perhaps could not be produced given the timeline, particularly relative to his own focus on the Commercial Core and economic development.

Mower echoed Lawson's concern and suggested that the committee go back to the basics: How is the Master Plan used, how could the survey serve to guide the development of the Master Plan.

French reminded the committee that Newport is a very different town and that the template was simply illustrative.

Ferris recommended that the committee look at what the other Town boards/committees say, find out what the concerns are, to help give us a start.

Moore commented that the first stumbling block with the template is the introduction. We must define what we're doing and why we're doing it. Is it just growth and development that the MP is about, or is it broader? Most important for us to get the introduction done so that we all agree, then go back to the committees and get feedback. Perhaps include the NH RSA and history of Durham Master Plans, note that the Master Plan is a tool of the Planning Board, and how the Planning Board uses it.

Parnell noted that an attempt was made perhaps 2 years ago to update the Master Plan, and it is difficult to make progress. Can look at the current Master Plan to see how things have changed, but almost have to look at it from scratch. Agreed that the introduction is important.

French reminded the committee that zoning can be thrown out in court if it does not refer to the Master Plan, i.e., that zoning is not valid without a Master Plan. If zoning contradicts MP, possibility of a suit.

French reiterates different types of master plans: 1) general attitude survey (how would they like the community to proceed in general), 2) post forum survey: alternative strategies or ideas how to achieve something that came out in the forum, a targeted strategic survey. We decided as a group to get a sense of directionality, what is important to the residents rather than the strategic level.

Lawson noted that the Master Plan 2000 is so specific that it reached down to the strategy level, a concern shared by several members of the Committee.

Luxem also questioned the specificity of the Master Plan 2000 and suggested that it should not project experience from today into 10 years but rather consider leaving it broad enough to allow for developments that cannot be imagined. She referenced the development of the internet and events of "9/11" and how society witnessed a shift of values as a result. She stated that we should leave it to the committees, Town staff and hired consultants to develop the strategies rather than put it in the Master Plan.

Donovan agreed, as long as the general questions on the survey inform that level.

Lawson offered another reason why he agreed: He was surprised at the flawed methodology for certain strategies incorporated into the Master Plan, specifically in the areas why there should not be any, or only limited, residential development. He observed that there has been no opportunity to go back and change that methodology. In his opinion, incorrect conclusions led to inappropriate strategies.

French was also surprised at the level of detail. Most other Master Plans talk about priorities and various mechanisms. French says that Cliff Sinnott, the Director of Rockingham Regional Planning, notes that one can have a very good Master Plan that is no more than 100 pages long. French reiterated that it is important to define the purpose and establish the introduction.

Ferris referenced suggestions from the committee he represents, the Integrated Waste Management Advisory Committee. When thinking of that committee, most people automatically think of recycling, but the question is, how far beyond that do you go? It is easy to come up with specific questions, but topics are harder. Three specific areas of concern to the IWMAC:

- 1) The relationship between consumption and recycling. One obvious question: should the surveys include anything about consumption? With less consumption, there is less need for recycling.
- 2) What is the awareness in this community of single-stream recycling? The Town is moving in that direction. If the survey asked a question about that, would we need to define it first? [The Master Plan 2000 says we have recycling numbers 3 through 7, but we currently don't; however, we will, starting in January 2011.]
- 3) Should the survey mention that some communities are declaring they are trying to move toward a zero waste community? Idealistic goal, but the idea is that you want to eliminate more and more waste.

French responded that Ferris mentioned two types of questions: Awareness, and desired trajectory. Awareness questions are a good check. The issue is that awareness questions take up a lot of space for one question. If you want to ask about more items, classify a question as an awareness question and group multiple different topics under that question. Rather than providing a lot of detail, use parentheses, give clear concise examples of what you mean. The trick is to find balance between asking more single questions and a range of questions.

Lawson noted that another challenge he has is when two questions are read and responded to independently, such as one related to land use and the other to economic development. People answer them separately, and the answers might conflict with one another. They have no opportunity to provide feedback, there appear to be conflicting attitudes, and there is no real read on what the respondent wants to protect, what he/she is willing to give up to gain something else.

French noted that prioritization questions are problematic for respondents and does not advise using them.

Luxem asked about choices between A and B, such as by setting up decision trees. For example, would you like Rte 108 as is, or would you allow at the intersection between 108 and 4 some industrial development? Yes or no. If you say no, you're done with that question. If you say yes, then you are asked, What kind of development would you feel comfortable with there? Medical, office, manufacturing, etc.

French stated that his survey software program does not have the capacity to deal with branch questions, so analysis would be difficult and costly.

Donovan noted that branching questions may be more appropriate to a strategy level. Bigger question is development or no, and where.

Moore reminded the committed that that it is an attitude survey. He is sensitive to the boards/committees, and that community trust in the boards is at stake. The people who really care come to the boards, and the boards sort out the issues. He stated that he does not have a problem with a survey that has conflicting issues.

Donovan noted that it is important to remember that this is the FIRST step in developing the Master Plan. Citizens can participate in the next steps. There will be opportunity all along the way to flush out additional topics or questions or nuances. The process will be difficult in part because some people are very engaged and informed, and others are not.

French noted that the survey is an education tool as much as anything else.

Parnell commented that there are very different attitudes in this town. There will be a minority with very different views on almost any topic.

French replied that he likes to see the frequency of responses to address that very point, i.e., the bar graph of distribution of responses.

Cunningham emphasized the board/committees' need to understand the purpose of the Master Plan survey, particularly since they would be devoting meeting time on this topic.

French: Let's frame out the purpose in bullet form. Borrow from Neal's: determine people's awareness of what's happening.

Ferris: Do we want to use this survey as a tool to get people to think about topics?

Moore referred to the introduction to the 2010 Southampton, Massachusetts survey and suggested borrowing from their wording: "We encourage you to focus on the qualities of our town that you value and to consider how you want our community to change over the next 10 to 20 years. If you do this, it will guide future decisions facing our community and address the following areas: land use, open space, housing, economic development, natural resources, recreation, energy and sustainability,

education, public services and facilities, and transportation.” He suggested that the introduction also include an explanation of what the Master Plan is and how the Planning Board uses it.

French noted that when he works with communities, the questions usually run along the lines of: What do we value? What attributes or qualities do we feel are at risk? How do we want our community to change? Then the work focuses on what types of questions to ask. There are different types, such as: desired trajectory (more, same, less) and awareness questions. One could also ask questions that rank how the town is doing.

Moore asked what type of question is appropriate for what topics or specific questions?

French provided examples: Quality: rank most important to least. Change: You’ve grown by X in the last 10 years. Do you want the current condition of Durham, population, to grow? Directionality or trajectory questions cannot be put in a matrix question but must be asked as single questions. For those, he recommends picking only the really important topics or questions. He also recommended following those up with an open-ended question to enable respondents to explain why they felt that way.

A discussion followed about the value of surveys that don’t have an impact on the Master Plan, such as those that would get at specific issues regarding downtown development.

Then followed a discussion about the timeframe of the committee’s work relative to the forum. The committee agreed that it would like to see a mailing of postcard—to all residents—alerting residents to the survey availability following the visioning forum, capitalizing on what happened at the forum.

French urged that the committee take back to the committees a statement of purpose and the discussion regarding categories of questions: value, trajectory of change/directionality, awareness (might be tied to change but might not). He noted another type of question: Options (preferred option) and expressed concern about tradeoff questions: they could be framed in a way that ignores other options, typically framed as win/win or zero-sum.

Moore commented that it all gets back to what happens with this information? Those questions get answered when you have a proposal on the table.

French noted that he prefers that a community conduct two surveys, pre and post, but of course, that requires more resources.

Luxem noted that Tom Elliott, Chair of the Economic Development Committee, wondered whether could do a political survey, select a subset as a representation of the town, and ask more questions.

Lawson compared that option to the federal census, in which some citizens are provided, at random, with a longer form. He expressed concern about representative sampling.

French commented that these only work well for very short, 1-minute survey, such as for polling.

Mower asked French to provide sample questions to take back to the boards/committees.

French noted that it is good to have only 2 different types of questions (categories). Quality questions can be answered in the matrix style. Awareness questions are trickier to ask in matrix style. He provided the example of Deerfield, which organized its survey questions about “green, built and social infrastructures.” When there are fewer categories, it is easier for respondents to get through the survey.

Members who had attended the November 16 meeting of the joint Master Plan Advisory Committee noted that Leslie Schwartz and Henry Smith will provide questions representing the Historic District Commission.

Tasks:

- Mower: Ask Jay Gooze, Council Representative to the Rental Housing Commission and to the Inclusionary Zoning Implementation Program committee about housing questions.
- French: Draft language regarding the purpose of the survey; provide examples of types of questions to the committee by early next week. Query Jim Campbell about postcards for the survey in addition to for the forum.
- Lawson: Provide an enhanced zoning map.

Lawson cautioned that it is important not to replicate B. Dennis Charrette experience, particularly relevant to downtown concerns.

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The next meeting will be December 9, from 5:00pm to 6:30pm

Meeting adjourned approximately 6:40pm

Minutes taker: Robin Mower