

Master Plan Update Committee 2023

Public Hearing 1

Meeting Minutes

February 14, 2024, 6:30 PM

Town Council Chambers

355 East Central Street

This meeting was available to be attended in person by all citizens. The meeting was also live-streamed by Franklin TV and shown on Comcast Channel 9 and Verizon Channel 29.

Recordings have been made available on Franklin TV's "Franklin Town Hall TV" YouTube channel. Additionally, citizens were able to participate remotely via phone and Zoom.

Committee Members in Attendance: *Chair Glenn Jones; Vice Chair Cobi Frongillo; Clerk Melanie Hamblen; Kenneth Elmore; Joe Halligan; Ginelle Lang; Gino Carlucci; Rick Power; Meghann Hagen; Bruce Hunchard; Erin Gallagher;*

Committee Members Absent: *Eric Steltzer; Jennifer Williams;*

Chair Glenn Jones called the meeting to order at 6:32 PM.

Public Hearing Presentation

Chair Jones introduced a presentation about the Master Plan process and the Master Plan Update Committee's role in it, along with their progress. The presentation also covered the role of each subcommittee, as well as a summary of the Town Inventory. Ms. Slankas began presenting the information, continued by Ms. Farmer and Mr. Maxtutis partway through. At the end of the presentation, Chair Jones thanked the Consultants and then allowed the subcommittees to introduce themselves. The roles and objectives of each subcommittee were explained by their respective chairs, along with information about their upcoming meeting dates and locations. Key questions from each subcommittee were also presented for audience members to keep in mind and provide feedback on.

Question and Answer with Public

- For the Housing and Economic Development Subcommittee's question: "How does Franklin thrive in a changed landscape for living space, work, and business?" Amy Johnson of 19 Addison Avenue asked how the Committee defines the word "thrive". She added that she believes that what it means to be thriving is probably different for someone in their 20s when compared to someone in their 30s or 40s or over 60. Member Elmore, as subcommittee Chair, said he hoped that would be a fundamental question that they talk about as a preamble to the entire master plan.
- Mr. Richard Frongillo commented that he would like to see additional housing options be embraced as it is not easy for his children to buy a house in Franklin, but also it is not easy for the aging population to downsize into smaller units. Chair Jones agreed with

his points that affordable housing stock is making the younger population have to leave the Town and even the State.

- Mr. Mark Minnichelli of 31 Longfellow Drive commented on Member Elmore's statement about the disruption of Covid-19 to commuting and said he believed that commuting by car will only be getting worse. Thus he is wondering if there are better things that can be done to leverage the commuter rail that runs through the Town. Chair Jones responded that following Vice Chair Frongillo and the CSFC subcommittee would be posing that question in their process.
- Member Hunchard commented that Mr. Frongillo's comment might be in reference to Vice Chair Frongillo living with him, to which Vice Chair Frongillo said he is happy to be able to live in Franklin due in part to being able to have an accessory dwelling unit be built on their property. Chair Jones added that affordable housing is something that Boston realized it needed to create to address the overpopulation and underdevelopment issue, and that is a discussion the Master Plan Committee and the Town need to both address as they go forward.
- Ms. Paula Longobardi commented that she understands the need for housing, but is still concerned about the sight of large scale apartment complexes going up. She added concerns with apartments being built on Grove Street in an area without sidewalks that would be near water resources. She is concerned about how much capacity there is at the Charles River Pollution Control to accommodate all proposed new building in the future. She added her concerns about increased car traffic resulting in bottlenecks around Beaver Street. Ms. Longobardi added concerns about other apartment projects on Summer Street, East Central Street, and near St. John's draining water resources, and so she is wondering at what rate the projects' impacts will be monitored and whether or not they will be on town sewer. She reiterated that she is not against growth, but is just concerned with it all happening at once. Chair LoPresti responded that residents can be sure that they are taking these concerns into consideration throughout the process, and will be addressing the issues the Committee continues to grow throughout it, including with water usage, wells, and sewer capacity. He added that they are keeping their open spaces in mind as they look to avoid overdevelopment in a community zone. Ms. Longobardi also asked if the apartments on Grove Street would have balconies at all, out of concern that outdoor grills could cause sparks that might set fire to the nearby forest.
- For the Community Services, Facilities, and Circulation Subcommittee, Vice Chair Frongillo, as subcommittee Chair, asked if anyone could think of services that are not provided or are, but could be expanded upon. Ms. Amy Johnson of 19 Addison Avenue commented that the services for the Franklin Library are "Tremendous" and more people should utilize them.
- Vice Chair Frongillo focused on the Circulation (transportation) element of his subcommittee and asked if there were any areas around Franklin where people feel less

safe and want to change. Chair Jones said it added to Mr. Frongillo's question of how people get around Town. He also built off of Ms. Longobardi's concern that traffic would become a worse issue in the future and they need to look at ways to ultimately reduce vehicular traffic and create ways to travel the community safer.

- Ms. Ali Rheume of 147 Summer Street commented that many crosswalks in the Downtown Area feel unsafe to a lot of people, in part because they are not obvious enough, but they include one by the end of Summer Street that one would cross to reach the Birchwood Bakery, and the large crosswalks on Main Street. Thus, she is wondering what they can do to improve that area for mobility and accessibility. Vice Chair Frongillo thanked her for her continued advocacy for accessibility and safety, and Chair Jones remarked that pedestrian safety is ultimately one of the things the community needs to address.
- Mr. Mark Minnichelli commented his agreement with the other points about pedestrian safety, adding that the brick area of the Main Street intersection with Dean Avenue is poorly lit at night and in rain. He also commented that he believes the GATRA service is underutilized and under-communicated resource available to people, but if they knew about it then they might avoid use of their car and be able to reach places they previously thought only reachable by car. He asked if, in the cause of making pedestrian circulation in the downtown area better, they could consider changing part of it into a pedestrian-only area.
- Mr. Thomas Such from 79 Populatic Street commented in regards to where people feel less safe in Franklin that additional traffic has grown on Populatic Street in the past 10 years due in part to new subdivisions nearby, and although the speed limit is 20 mph, there are no sidewalks. Thus, he feels less safe on Populatic Street from the additional cars and traffic. Chair Jones thanked Mr. Such for his comment and said that his concern has been added to their notes.
- Member Hagen, Chair of the OSRP and NCHR subcommittee, presented her questions about what historical and natural preservation projects should be prioritized; and how the Town can best reach the community for public outreach and education around Open Spaces and Natural, Cultural, and Historic Resources. A member of the public commented that the information from the Town website has been getting better and better, with the email updates also being great. So perhaps Twitter or other applications that could be subscribed to could be helpful. Chair Jones asked what her preferred methods of receiving information from the Town are, to which she answered the Town website. Member Elmore asked to poll the current audience on the same question of their preferred communication method from the Town. Mr. Minnichelli also said the Town website was his preferred way of receiving information, and applauded the Open Space and Recreation Plan for DelCarte that is on the Conservation webpage as a template worthy of being replicated for other information. Mr. Such agreed that the Town Website is also his preferred way of learning what is going on in Town. Ms.

Rheaume said that, in addition to the Town website, she also uses email and social media such as Franklin Matters and the Franklin Observer as resources. Mr. Davin from 85 Oxford Drive provided his feedback that the Town website is excellent and has improved a lot, but thinks there is room for improvement wherein Town Departments could push rather than try to pull information and attention. He added that there are opportunities to reach out through the schools, sports teams, senior center, etc. to share information rather than just having to learn from singular individuals as points of contact through the Town. Chair Jones responded asking how Mr. Davin found out about the public hearing, which he answered that he had learned about it on Instagram. He added that increased development along Prospect Street with Bellingham and the increased traffic from it had led him to attend the meeting and determine that he needs to be more aware of what is happening. Chair Jones remarked that it is great to hear about him wanting to be more aware, and then asked if the Committee were to choose a Historical or Preservation Project, what he would prioritize. Mr. Davin answered Schmidt Farms, citing the open space and opportunities to have things like a farmers market there. Chair Jones asked, if the Committee were to put together an ad hoc subcommittee to work on the topic of Schmidt's Farm, would Mr. Davin join the subcommittee or share his input with it, to which Mr. Davin said yes.

- Mr. Davin also commented in regards to the changing economic environment of housing and work from home, saying that the pandemic had put the Town ahead 5-8 years in terms of how people work and how they commute. As more people are being called back into commuting into work, conditions will probably slowly reverting back to what they were in 2019, and so the Committee should consider that before any drastic decisions are made with addressing current circumstances. Chair Jones thanked Mr. Davin for his comments, and noted that Open Space areas including Schmidt's Farm had been purchased in the last few years with the idea of mitigating overdevelopment in mind.
- Member Hagen asked if there were any comments on accessibility for the Open Spaces, as the Town is making a concentrated effort on accessibility and she would be interested to hear any more input people might have.
- Member Lang, Chair of the Land Use & Zoning subcommittee, asked the audience for thoughts on two questions: How might (they) encourage responsible development that enhances the character of Franklin while activating underused areas; and also what areas in Franklin could benefit most from reimagining their current land use, and how might those adjustments positively impact the people of Franklin. Mr. Minnichelli responded to the first question that, if large development projects are going up, then in his opinion they are better off in the Downtown area and the section of East Central Street close to Town. He added that some areas that are zoned right now to exclude residential could be rezoned to make that possible, but having the residential be included in the central areas could help prevent an increase of traffic that results from

most new residential projects. He added that accessory dwelling units could be helpful in the area near the Downtown station area more so than out and away from it.

Member Carlucci commented on how the current development near Downtown, in comparison to the areas of Open Space that the Town has purchased away from being developable that would have required cars to travel to and from, is conducive to new residents not needing to use cars. Chair Jones responded to comments made about a friendly 40B affordable housing project on 121 Grove Street and how the Committee Members do consider potentially detrimental impacts and the loss of industrial-zoned land even when they understand that the Town needs more affordable housing.

- Member Carlucci, Chair of the Sustainability subcommittee, asked for ideas on how the Town could best reduce greenhouse gas emissions, noting that the Town has taken many steps already in terms of making its buildings more efficient and transitioning to using electric vehicles and utilizing electricity from solar farms. Mr. Minnichelli commented encouragement of the Town to look at the EnergizeFranklin.org website as a platform for educating people on how they can reduce greenhouse gas emissions. He also said that there are laws that are not being enforced that could help, such as idling cars in the morning.
- At the request of any additional questions, Mr. Such commented that not everyone uses social media, and asked if what is being posted on social media mirror what is being put on the Town website. Clerk Hamblen responded that anyone should be able to find the same information on the Town website that they might find on social media. Chair Jones highlighted the newsletter option that pops up when people visit the Town website, as well as Stephen Sherlock of Franklin Matters as a useful source of information.

Ms. Slankas said she was glad that so many people from the public were engaged in the process. She added that the Consultants are happy to be working with the Town and the Committee, and thanked everyone for their help and input.

Next Meetings (Main Committee)

March 6, 2024 at 6:30PM

Open House: March 23, 2024 from 11:00AM-2:00PM or 3:00PM at Dean College, room TBD

Public Hearing 2: April 10, 2024

Next Meetings (subcommittees)

Open Space & Recreation, Natural, Cultural, and Historic Resources: TBD

Community Service, Facilities & Circulation: March 6, 2024 at 5:15PM

Land Use and Zoning: March 4, 2024 at 7:00PM

Housing & Economic Development: February 15, 2024 at 5:00PM

Sustainability: TBD

Additional Comments

Adjourn Meeting

Member Hunchard motioned to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Clerk Hamblen. There was a unanimous vote in favor of adjourning. Meeting adjourned at 8:24 PM.

Respectfully Submitted

Tyler Paslaski

--Master Plan Update Committee Approved Minutes at April 17, 2024 Meeting