



Long Range Planning Advisory Committee (LPAC+)

Wednesday, February 8, 2012 Minutes

Attendance:

Name	Present	Name	Present	Name	Present
Rebecca Casey	-	Bud French	√	Hugh Coxe	√
Paul Bergkamp	√	Kurt Klebe	√	Jim Thibodeau	√
Steve Hendry	√	Sandra Lipsey	√	Julie Motherwell	√
Rachel Reed	-	Sam Rudman	√	Steve Walker	√
Claudia King	-				

- Council Liaison:** -
Staff present: Nathan Poore, Theo Holtwijk
Others present: -

The meeting was called to order by Sam Rudman at 7:02 PM.

1. Minutes

Upon a motion by Sandra and second by Paul, the revised minutes of December 8, 2011 were unanimously approved.

2. Discussion with Town Manager on Comprehensive Plan

Sam welcomed Nathan and said he was looking forward to a free flowing discussion. Theo distributed the questions that the committee had prepared for Nathan.

Nathan first took the group back in time. He noted that there had been a Town hall and culture change. Before the community had struggled with planning issues. The CBI report was followed by a better direction. It took some time to get LPAC reestablished. To do this right shows how important the work of this committee is.

Nathan stated that the Comprehensive Plan lays the community's foundation for change, or for keeping things the same, for the next 10 to 15 years. It is a very important task.

Nathan saw the following as major opportunities:

- Commercial development along Route 1.
- He has not heard divisiveness on that issue.

- Commercial development along exit 53 and Route 100.

There is potential between Leighton and Mountain roads that should be explored. Residents in this area should be asked about that.

- Open Space.

Open space helps to define growth and non-growth areas, Nathan said. Questions in growth areas are typically about density and not-in-my-backyard issues. Non-growth areas can be more of an issue and involve density issues and conservation zoning. The Town has bought a significant amount of private land in recent years. This has been well accepted, thanks to a coordinated planning effort, buy-in and relatively modest use of local tax dollars.

Steve W. asked about the “finish line” for open space acquisitions. Nathan felt that the Town was getting there. He showed a broad swatch through town that could be open space. The current Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) issue at the elementary schools may prompt the Town to buy more open space. The list of remaining key properties is getting short. In the future the Town may address new opportunities that may come up. An executive session by the Council on 2/13 will help set the negotiation parameters for the LWCF issue.

Sam wondered whether about \$4M was left for open space acquisitions. Nathan said that the original plan was for \$10M of acquisitions, with \$5M to come from local tax dollars through an approved referendum vote. The Council may borrow up to \$2M. The Council set aside \$500K per year, which was reduced to \$100K per year when the recession hit. Nathan thought that at least \$3.5M was left of the \$5M, and that the Council has the authorization to purchase additional open space.

- Falmouth 2.0

There are a lot of initiatives currently happening or will be happening in Falmouth. Nathan gave a series of examples, from Veterans Memorial, Route One, updated website, to the upcoming Tercentennial. All these projects are connected in some way as they speak to what Falmouth stands for. The Falmouth of the future can be termed Falmouth 2.0. He expected this effort to get started in March-April with the Veterans Memorial and better navigation for the Town’s web site. He thought that these efforts all have a positive feel.

- Budget

Budget pressures will continue. There will never be enough money to do all we want or could do.

- Tercentennial

In 2018 Falmouth will be 300 years old. How does the community wish to celebrate that?

- Energy

New energy options are being explored, such as natural gas and wind power, that Falmouth should stay on top of. The Town is part of an effort with Cumberland and Yarmouth to explore the feasibility of bringing natural gas here. It would access commercial areas, but not residential neighborhoods. What kind of subsidy will be required to accomplish that?

- Growth

Growth is an issue, but also an opportunity. The Town should plan for growth.

Sam asked if Nathan meant commercial or residential growth. Nathan said both.

Sandra asked if LPAC should lead or follow the Council. She felt that that was not clear from her appearances with the Council. How far out in front of the Council should the committee be? Nathan felt that was a good question. He was recently asked to bring stronger recommendations to the Council. Doing so can get sticky, he said. His advice was for the committee to check in with the Council frequently, especially when it gets to growth areas.

Kurt noted that there soon would be new councilors who needed to be brought up to speed.

Sandra felt that the committee could dare to be a little more out there. Paul stated that checking in with the Council was a good way of calibrating what the committee was working on. Jim agreed and said that the work of the committee needed to be seen in order to be appreciated.

Nathan suggested that when the committee is doing its checking in not to ask too many questions of the Council.

Sam asked if economic development and land use were the major topics for the committee.

Nathan stated that land use was a core topic, but that economic development was of growing interest. However, the Town does not have an economic development plan or guide. As a result there is no policy as what the Town should pursue: small companies, large companies, etc.? Just the other day a call center expressed interest. Should the Town pursue that? Nathan thought a clear vision for Route North could be useful. Currently no retail use is allowed there and that makes sense, he stated. Should the Town try to recruit companies? Town staff has currently no guidance on that. The Town met with Matt Jacobson, formerly of Maine and Company, and Matt had suggested that the Town have a plan in place, so it is clear to others what is and is not acceptable to the community.

Jim asked how long preparing such a plan would take. Nathan thought up to a year. He cautioned the committee against preparing such a plan. He said the committee should state the need for completion of such a plan in a specific timeframe. Theo added that the opportunity existed for relationship building in that area between Council, FEIC, LPAC, FEDC, etc. Sandra agreed with Nathan that it was important to get things in motion, to create an intention and energy that will cause the economic development plan to happen.

Sam asked question 6 of the prepared list: "What do you think we should plan for in terms of commercial development 10 years from now? How do you predict that commercial development will have grown/ not grown in the next 10 years and what plans need to be put in place to adapt to these commercial developments?"

Nathan stated that the Town has laser focus on Route One as that area had the most potential. He expected that in 10 years the Falmouth Shopping Center would be redeveloped and expanded. He also felt that Route One North had potential, as well as the Route 100

stretch and area around Exit 53. He commented on the Route 100 bridge redesign and its impact on the developability of nearby properties. He felt it was hard to predict what could happen along Route 100. He expected things to continue to evolve along Route One. He recounted what a different place that was in the 1980's. The CDC is now looking at a streetscape-type environment to help set the tone for the next 25 years.

Kurt noted that business types changed along Route One. He wondered what the trends for that were and how those could be enhanced, so Falmouth retains a competitive edge.

Nathan felt that the trends were towards more of a streetscape environment and mixed use. He cited the multi-story building at Tidewater as an example. He cautioned that Route One would not become a typical Main Street type environment. Along Route One North he envisioned more high tech office buildings. He also suggested that parking requirements should be reduced as Falmouth requires too much parking. He would rather see that space devoted to building. He also envisioned more walkability and bicycle access.

Sam asked if there was an out of state community that set the example for that. Nathan cited Keene, NH and Mashpee Commons on Cape Cod.

Jim asked what the odds were for natural gas to come to Falmouth. Nathan said that the consultant was optimistic, but that many questions remained. For example, how could it be structured as there was no motivation by the gas companies to pursue that. Could a municipal utility be created? What would the payback on bonding be? Gas could come off Tuttle Road in Cumberland and come down along Route One. A connection from Brookside to Leighton has also been looked at. However, the Unitil line near Brookside is old and may have capacity issues, so the Tuttle Road option seems more feasible.

Kurt asked if residential customers could be tied in along the way. Nathan said yes, but that accessing neighborhoods had issues. He mentioned that residential use is often a financial loss to the gas company, or at best a wash. He also discussed why coming across Martin's Point Bridge was not an option.

Sandra commented that the survey had surprising results regarding regional coordination. Residents felt that, as long as Falmouth was in charge, regional coordination was OK. She asked how citizens could be helped to accept changes that will ultimately benefit them.

Nathan said he had not given up on regionalism. He thought that with changes in electronic communication and how people interact in neighborhoods, they may become more accepting regionalism. He cited the regional dispatch success and the fact that many school districts did consolidate.

He felt the area of most promise was police protection. One police department could serve Yarmouth, Cumberland, and Falmouth. He was not sure that efforts in other areas would save money. He felt it was a mistake to pursue it for fire protection. Savings might be obtained for call apparatus, but he expected a decline in volunteer firefighters who feel a sense of belonging to the town, but maybe not a 3-town area. Falmouth currently has about 100 call fire fighters. He stated that Cumberland had no interest in a police merger. Nathan

felt that it was critical to first get the leaders of merger partner(s) communities on board, before more education of Falmouth citizens is done.

Jim asked about for Nathan's thoughts on sewer. Jim felt this was critical to have public sewer for commercial development and compact housing.

Nathan replied that a sewer study may be needed. He felt that the Town was OK on the treatment side, but that its collection system and pumping stations were aging and could require significant money to upgrade. He noted that there had been recent issues at one pumping station, but were addressed thanks a quick response.

Jim wondered if regionalization with Portland made sense for the sewer system.

Nathan stated that Portland's sewage is treated by the Portland Water District (PWD). Cumberland's sewage is treated by Falmouth, but is collected by PWD. When this was looked at some time ago, the costs by PWD were higher than in Falmouth. Perhaps a recommendation by the committee could be to look at options other than the current sewer set up.

Jim felt that public sewer could provide opportunities for affordable housing.

Sam wondered if sewer lines lead to development. And if so, where should lines be recommended?

Jim cited the example of Ledgewood Drive where several recent projects have no sewer, but where there is close proximity to a sewer line in Portland.

Nathan suggested that for a growth area-sewer discussion the group should meet with Pete Clark. Julie replied that her subcommittee had done that twice, but looked more at the feasibility of sewer extensions.

Sam asked Jim what affordable housing represented in his mind. Jim said a 3 BR house for \$250-300K, denser, condo-style dwellings. A discussion ensued on workforce housing and low income housing.

Nathan thought that the Woods Road workforce housing represented a well thought out plan. He felt, though, that it was on the wrong property as the development costs were too high. Theo mentioned that a range of units and prices were included for that project.

Affordable housing typically targets populations at a percentage of median area income, such 80-120%, 50-80%, less than 50%. Affordable housing cost also takes household size into consideration.

Kurt wondered if affordable housing is pursued as a social good or also for economic reasons. Jim commented on the need to educate kids that may live in affordable housing. Sandra mentioned the need to be exposed to a full range of economic experiences in a community. Hugh felt that there was also an economic argument as a diverse economy and diverse workforce was good for a community.

Kurt noted the closeness of Portland and wondered how that played into it. Hugh said that it depended on what type of community one envisioned. Sandra agreed and said that it gets down to values. If people work in Falmouth, they should be able to live in Falmouth, she said. They may not choose to do so, but it should be possible. She felt that Falmouth needed an intervention plan. If there was no provision for affordable housing then the community ends up for transit.

Kurt wondered how many employees of TD bank live in Falmouth. That was not known. Best guess was that of 600 employees less than half live in Falmouth. The census has commuting data. This is in the economy chapter.

Paul asked if the Town thinks about migration issues, as in-migration seems to drive property values.

Nathan replied that the order of magnitude impact of 50-60 affordable homes would not be extreme on the town. He also noted the Forbes report and the 50 additional students that have now entered the school system. This could present capacity issues.

Theo gave another take on migration issues. About 40% of OceanView residents already live in Falmouth. Another 40% have relatives in Falmouth, and the remaining 20% have no Falmouth connection before moving to OceanView.

Sam asked if the term affordable housing and workforce housing could be used interchangeably. Nathan said that it would be good to define the terms.

Sam asked if Falmouth should have affordable housing. Nathan said that it was a social good that could provide for the teachers, policemen, and retail store managers to live here.

Kurt asked if a portion of the Woods Road project was set aside for municipal employees. That was not the case, and there are laws prohibiting that. The Town did survey Town employees for their interest and did not find a lot of interest.

Jim asked about school capacity and wondered if there could be a problem with the capacity at the High School. Nathan said it would be good to get projections from Superintendent Powers on that. He did know that Middle School needed renovation work.

Steve H. noted that in his meeting with others and the Superintendent there was a sense that the peak was happening now and is expected to go down some over the next few years.

Julie wondered what will happen when the open enrollment plan by the governor goes through. This proposal would establish an open -enrollment program that would allow students to attend participating private and public schools beyond their town and district boundaries.

Paul asked how the Town balances the budget with the tax base. Nathan stated that on the municipal side the projections are flat. He felt that the Town had done a good job managing its finances. This is conformed by the opinion of the rating agencies, such as Moody's. He

expected annual valuation to increase by about \$20M. This is a growth of about 1%/year. This compares to about 2%/year before the recession. He did not think it would fall to less than 1 % and that Falmouth had weathered the storm.

Nathan noted that excise tax was important. He felt the Town had a proper capital projects reserve system that was fully funded. This system does not include major building projects. He noted that Falmouth was a fairly diversified community.

Jim asked if the size of Town government as largest employer in Falmouth was sustainable. He noted the recent FEDC letter and wondered if the size of government should shrink. Kurt asked if teachers were included. Jim clarified that the number he saw included all Town employees.

Nathan replied that the cost per student for administrative services at the school showed a good ratio. He noted that the student to teacher ration was close to capacity. How much farther should the Town go? How many students do people want to see in a class? He stated that expectations in Falmouth were high.

Nathan cited a benchmarking survey that was done for the police department. The Town cut one officer position, but other costs increased. In general this department staffing is below average. In the clerk's office in Town Hall, staffing has been reduced from 6 to 4 positions, and Nathan is considering going to 3. He has cut one position in Parks, one mechanic in Public Works, and has part time codes office help. He stated that many reductions have already happened, including cutting hourly employees from 40 to 37 hours per week.

He stated that he would not recommend cuts at Fire Department, and tried to make cuts at Public Works. The Town does have three finance positions, but they are configured differently than in other towns. The planning staff is above average, but that is driven by work from the Council. The Town also used to spend \$100K per year on consultants and Theo has been saving the Town that value twice over, including working on economic development.

In general, Nathan does not see a need for growth. He generally looks at opportunities to restructure when positions are vacated.

Jim said that Nathan's take sounded reasonable.

Nathan added that other savings could come from combining towns, which was looked at about five years ago.

Jim felt that the Council was asking for a lot of staff assistance. Nathan commented that the Council had become more focused.

Julie asked how Public Works staffing compared to Cumberland and if unions were hamstringing the Town's efforts to save money.

Nathan replied that unions do not hamstring the Town too much, but that costs are largely driven by wages and benefits. The benchmarking study showed that Public Works staffing was a little lower than average.

Julie wondered if the mechanic's shop could be regionalized. Nathan replied that a full analysis had been done on that and that it did not work as extra time was time with drop off and pick up of vehicles. The Falmouth PW garage services, besides PW vehicles, police, fire, and school buses. That is a huge fleet.

The Town has as many drivers as it has snow plow routes and the routes are typically longer than in other towns.

Sam asked how the tax base should be expanded, with large employers, big boxes, or with small businesses.

Nathan felt that was a land use and assessing question. From a tax perspective class A office buildings may generate the most tax, but that should be checked with the assessor. Nathan noted that, with Scarborough, Falmouth's tax rate was the lowest around.

Jim said that property values recently had taken a nose dive and wondered if Nathan concurred.

Nathan said that one should look at all variables, including comps. He said that Falmouth's ratio of assessed value to market value was currently at 108-109%. The question is: are we equalized? Is the assessment across the board fair?

Kurt asked if the Town looks at the differences that can occur between coastal areas and more inland parts of town. Nathan said yes. He mentioned that communities that are dependent on tourism typically see those differences even stronger.

Julie noted the recently announced increase in school aid to the valuation drop.

Nathan said there is a story behind the story. State aid is based on market value. One needs to know the statewide average. Most of the extra funds for Falmouth are not for operations.

Kurt noted that a revaluation may lead to an adjustment of the tax rates, but that one's taxes would typically stay the same.

Sam asked if there was value in regional coordination in luring a developer to come to the area. Nathan said yes, and noted the efforts of the Greater Portland Economic Development Corporation. This was an outgrowth of the Metro regional coalition in 2006. This started with the regional crime lab, which turned out to be a benefit for all participating communities.

Paul wondered what the levers were for economic development. Nathan stated that there was some low hanging fruit that is being pursued by FEIC and GPEDC, including branding the area.

Sam asked if there was enough land zoned for commercial development. Hugh responded that that was an issue for the land use chapter. There has not been any real discussion on that. There were critics of the 2000 Plan who said it was a plan to plan. Some felt that the Woodville planning work was a disaster He wondered what the Council's expectations were for the land use chapter. What is it looking for?

Nathan replied that the Council is looking for nothing too elaborate, exotic or creative, but rather a solid foundation and some recommendations on compact development.

Kurt asked if the current compact development study could be used as a basis for that. Nathan said yes. He added that if the committee found that something was working, it was OK to point that out and recommend that it be enhanced further.

Kurt noted that compact development had the least consensus in the survey. Jim added that people seemed afraid of compact development.

Hugh noted that the committee should get ahead of itself.

Jim commented that the natural resource protection proposal was a difficult process that did not lead to acceptance by the Council. He wondered how much work should be done on something the Council may not accept. He felt that the ordinances were too complicated and asked if they should be made more flexible.

Nathan stated that an administrative rewrite of the ordinance has been on the "to do" list.

Nathan commented on transportation. He felt that the timing of the survey affected how people responded to the road repair questions. A number of large repairs were done immediately after the survey. He felt that local roads were generally in good repair. The town has a VUEworks system to keep track of what is needed where and when. He could not comment on future congestion issues as that would require town-wide traffic modeling.

Nathan felt that the Town's public facilities were generally in good shape. There is work needed at the Winn Road fire station and at Town hall.

Nathan then addressed the last question on the list. How should Falmouth brand itself? People see Falmouth for its schools, its quality of life, low crime rate, its closeness to Portland and convenient access to highways. He wondered if this question was meant that Falmouth should compete with others, or was better than other communities, or should for look for its niche. He felt that Falmouth should celebrate the attributes it had.

Jim said that the committee was asked to make recommendations for the Council and wondered if Nathan could provide any recommendations for the committee. Nathan said he could provide that as a follow up.

Sam thanked Nathan very much for coming and thought that it was a very worthwhile discussion. The committee agreed.

3. Next meeting

LPAC+ will meet again on February 23 at 7:00 PM to do a check-in on the completion status of all chapters. Sam urged the group to continue to work on that.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 PM.

Draft minutes prepared by Theo Holtwijk, February 9, 2012