

Falmouth Town Council Comprehensive Plan Update Discussion February 22, 2010

Theo Holtwijk presented an overview of the staff memo he prepared for the Council.

Councilor Libby:

Stated his concerns with the bureaucracy at the State and asked what the Town's options were for not doing a Comp Plan Update. He also asked if it was mandatory. (It is not mandatory, but may be beneficial for legal protection, grant applications, and general good planning.)

Councilor Rodden:

Felt that the entire Comp Plan did not need to be redone, but that efforts could be focused on TDR, compact development, economic development, where dense development would be, where protected land would be, where business activity should be, and what kind of commercial areas the town is envisioning. Regarding the two options presented by staff, she wondered if option B (tackling separate projects) would result in a quicker update process. (Town manager responded by saying that each of the Comp Plan chapters relies on each other and that he and CDD staff preferred option A.) Councilor Rodden asked if any expenses for consultants were involved. (Town Manager replied perhaps some for mapping by Judy Colby George.)

Councilor Armitage:

Felt that Comp Plan Update was important for the Town. He did not think that the Town had a good plan right now as it did not provide clear guidance. He preferred option A. He was not concerned with the details and felt that was the job of LPAC+. He did not want to direct LPAC+. He saw the update as an opportunity to deal the Town's ordinance and overlay districts, overlapping ordinances, and a way to clear things up. He felt that it was clear where the denser areas and commercial areas were, and that perhaps the "other" areas should be looked at. He wondered if the plan should be rewritten from scratch. He wanted to keep the update simple. He saw an analogy with a strategic plan for a business: where are you going, how will you get here, what will it look like in 25 years? He was not in favor of doing individual projects, although he did feel Route 100 was an issue.

Councilor Payne:

Felt LPAC+ needed to review Comp Plan 2000 critically. He saw two questions: where are we in the 2000 vision, and where are we weak? He felt a need for clarity and understanding of current conditions. He proposed a phased approach and that would help to determine which areas to pursue. An initial review by LPAC+ on the two questions with interim report to Council, would allow Council to provide a better, more refined charge. As far as key issues, he saw: where to grow, where to conserve, and the transportation challenges the Town faces. He felt that traffic may choke in 50 years if it is not addressed. In reading the 2000 Plan he was concerned with the tone of the plan regarding property rights. He was looking for a greater balance. He also wondered what the Town's "finish line" was regarding the acquisition of open space. He also noted the nuance in the language on protecting forested land. Did that mean Town-owned forested land (which he could see), or did it mean privately-owned forested land? In short he recommended LPAC+ to do observations and make recommendations so the charge could be refined.

Councilor Chase:

Reminded everyone that owners of land make plans as well. He hesitated if the Town should spend a lot of time in preparing a Comp Plan Update. He felt it was important to be open for business and create a tax base. He saw some successful developments in town, all of which had their own zoning through contract zones. He felt that the ordinances should be guidelines. He asked how much open space the Town wanted.

Councilor Pierce:

Wanted to do an update. Saw it as tool that would protect businesses, home owners as well as open space. She liked option A. She liked the finish line concept that Councilor Payne brought up. She felt the update was an opportunity to make decisions on workforce housing (should the Town leave this to the private market or not?), to create more density and walkability. She wanted LPAC+ to review 2000 Comp Plan. She thought that a deadline date for completion would be good and that the Council should provide tight direction. She did see the Update as an opportunity to go “all the way.”

Councilor Breen:

Wanted to tackle an update. Was in favor of option A. Felt that the Town had some givens that were unlikely to change, such as where the commercial areas and schools are located. She thought the update should address if, and where, compact development should be located. Felt the Town had done a good job protecting open space on the western part of town, and the Town does not need to be the owner of open space, that other entities could do so as well, that there were a variety of mechanisms. She recommended that the update keep regional issues in mind. She noted that GPCOG, with SPO’s blessing, would like to prepare a Greater Portland Comprehensive Plan, but that such an effort was five years down the road. GPCOG started with that effort in the lakes region as there was less planning capacity there. She passed out the sustainability principles that were developed and adopted by GPCOG. She wanted LPAC+ to take a look at the Town’s neighboring communities and their plans and interconnect where possible. She saw it as acting regionally on our own. Regarding ordinance updates: those were done to some extent. She was looking for more expressive ordinances and suggested that LPAC+ look at SmartCode and the graphics that come with that. She felt that the approach of small neighborhood master planning charrettes was not the way to go. She felt it was not effective and noted that so far only three out of twelve areas had been planned in that manner.

Councilor Armitage:

Noted that Saco had a timeframe of 18 months to gets its update done. He felt that LPAC+ may need to meet every other week. Perhaps an update could be completed in May 2011.

Councilor Rodden:

Felt that LPAC+ should determine its own meeting schedule.

Councilor Breen:

Recapped the discussion. It seemed there was a preference for option A, for the plan to be completed expeditiously, that LPAC+_ should be given a finite amount of time to get he plan done, that LPAC+ should come back to the Council for an interim check-in with a one-page outline addressing its proposed mechanism of how to go about the update and the frequency of its meetings.

Councilor Rodden:

Asked about the Council's expectations for the role of the CDC, and its council liaison, in the update process. Would it be appropriate to put forth ideas other than those mentioned tonight as tonight's discussion was "skeletal." For example, make proposals for neighborhood ordinances which may make a coffeehouse possible.

General responses:

CDC should make sure update gets scheduled on Council agendas as needed. CDC liaison should take listening role, not guide LPAC+. CDC does not speak for Council. Each councilor, however, is also a citizen and can participate in the update process as any citizen and make suggestions accordingly, go to meetings, speak up, etc. The visioning process may identify other ideas that councilors have not yet mentioned. Staff may also have recommendations.

Town Clerk Meeting Summary:

The Council approved of Option A: A traditional Comprehensive Plan approach from State Planning Office with the following components:

1. Vision statement.
2. Analyses, condition and trend data.
3. Policies and strategies.
4. Regional coordination program.
5. Future Land Use plan
6. Implementation section
7. Future periodic evaluation

Staff can prepare the required analyses, condition and trend data, while LPAC+ can focus on the Vision, updating the Policies for all topic areas, and preparing a new Implementation Plan addressing all topics. It is likely that much of the Comprehensive Plan 2000 can readily be incorporated in an Update.

Next step:

Theo will take the Council feedback and schedule the first LPAC+ meeting.

Notes by Theo Holtwijk, February 25, 2010