

Great Barrington Master Plan Committee (MPC)

Minutes of February 7, 2013
Great Barrington Fire Station

The meeting was called to order at 7:35 PM by Co-Chairperson Michael Wise.

Members present: Barbara Bailly, Andrew Blechman, Ryan Caruso, Shep Evans, Jonathan Hankin, Paul Ivory, Bill Meier, Vivian Orłowski, David Rutstein (voting alternate), and Michael Wise. Also present was Chris Rembold, Town Planner.

Members absent: Charles Bouteiller, Ethan Culleton, Richard Dohoney, Suzanne Fowle (alternate), Michele Gilligan, Deborah Phillips, David Shanahan.

Minutes of January 24, 2013

Wise pointed out two small errors. The minutes were approved, as amended, without objection.

Draft Transportation chapter

The transportation chapter delivered at the last meeting was discussed. Blechman pointed out that the airport is an unusual resource for a small town. The Committee asked that more detail about the airport be included in the chapter, for example whether they are planning to expand operations, hangers, or activities. It was pointed out that the airport is important for emergency services (emergency helicopters, for example) and is increasing offerings of community events like the Fly In. Rembold will discuss with the airport and update the next draft chapter as may be necessary.

Evans asked about Town winter maintenance of private roads. He said there are other communities in the Berkshires that have created a road maintenance district where property owners pay a fee in addition to real estate taxes to the Town in order to cover maintenance costs. Rembold asked why paying real estate taxes is not sufficient, since residents on town roads pay taxes and have their roads plowed by the Town. Evans said it may not be an issue, but if it was there may be ways to address it. Blechman asked how this should be approached. Rembold said it could come up during budget discussions because the detail is in each year's budget.

Meier said a goal to include bike racks, particularly in downtown, is needed in the draft. He said the bike racks could be sculptural projects, like the artsy recycling containers on Main Street. Rembold said the Main Street project is including bike racks, but many facilities like the Fire Station do not have bike racks. Rembold said he would add this goal. The Committee agreed.

Caruso asked that the scenic railway be mentioned in the railroad section as a tourist attraction. The Committee agreed.

Evans asked that the role and responsibility of the Town Manager to guide departments and capital project recommendations be made clearer or more explicit. This should be done throughout the plan. The Committee agreed.

Draft Historic and Cultural Resources chapter

Rembold noted that properties listed in the Local Historic District are protected by local regulations. National Register listings indicate the historic significance of a building but are not protected or regulated unless federal funds are involved in the project. The Committee asked that the text better explain the differences, significance, and regulations if any of Local Historic Districts and National Register listings.

Bailly asked Rembold to double check the list of cemeteries. She thought several might be missing from the list.

The Committee agreed to move the list of scenic landscapes and heritage trees to the open space and natural resources chapter. Landscapes that have historic significance, like the Fairgrounds, Mt. Peter, Butternut Basin, Beartown State Forest, and Monument Mountain should be listed here as well.

Blechman asked that a goal to promote historic and cultural resources be included. Wise noted it is already draft Goal HC-2 with many accompanying strategies. Blechman continued saying the Town needs to make a concerted effort to promote heritage trails, bike trails and other brochures that already exist, and develop new tours and theme trails that might be of interest. Ivory said Housatonic Heritage can assist. Rembold noted the Historic Commission could be the lead on this, and it has already developed the downtown audio/narrated walking tour app. The Selectmen could push it from an economic development perspective.

Meier noted that Simon's Rock hosts lectures on Du Bois. Rutstein noted that there is a downtown walking tour brochure already, and it is available in town hall and in trail kiosks. Blechman said at the very least the Town website needs to have all of these brochures in one central place. The website needs to be easier for tourists and residents to find interesting things to do. This is a question of basic marketing. There should be a goal for a logical or comprehensive marketing strategy. Rembold suggested the Town work more with the Chamber on these functions, as the town has limited website expertise.

Bailly suggested there be a focus on educating youth about local history. The Town and schools could work together to promote the town's heritage and important figures, and develop it in the school curriculum, field trips, and so on. Rutstein said the senior center could be a part of it as well.

Ivory strongly recommended the Town take a more pro-preservation posture regarding the former Housatonic school. The current draft has a vague statement. Rembold reiterated the existing annual carrying costs of approximately \$50,000 per year, the recommendations of the task force, and development challenges. Wise said our town's choices have financial consequences, and this may be an issue where the Committee should recognize we cannot have everything we want. He asked whether the town will make a decision or just continue to be hopeful. Bailly said the task force put a lot effort into their work and it is a shame that nothing has happened. Blechman said he is optimistic that the building can be used. Ivory said he recognized development challenges, but the first option should be preservation. The Committee agreed that the master plan should include a goal for preservation and mixed-use redevelopment of the school.

There was no consensus on what should happen if the goal of preservation and redevelopment is not achieved. Meier asked if the Committee should recommend a timeline for action if the goal is not achieved in a certain number of years, and then a different approach should be taken. There was some discussion that the school could be used partly for affordable housing units. Wise suggested taking up the issue again when we see the next drafts of housing and historic resources.

Draft Energy and Climate chapter

Rembold said he is waiting to complete the Services and Facilities chapter until he reviews the upcoming fiscal year 2014 budget for the town and schools. He will send the chapter out for the next meeting.

Rembold presented a brief overview of the Energy and Climate chapter. He noted that the chapter includes a brief about renewables, including that hydroelectric and wind power are not likely in Great Barrington, but solar could work. There is a brief section about how an integrated set of actions can help mitigate the impacts of climate change.

The Committee agreed to review the chapter in more depth at the next meeting.

Other Issues and Concerns

The next regular meeting will be February 28 at 7:30 at the Fire Station.

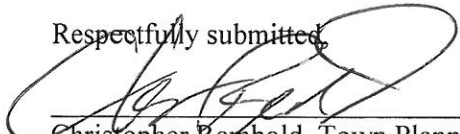
Adjournment

Hearing no further business, Wise adjourned the meeting at 9:10 PM.

Materials distributed or presented at this meeting:

- Draft Minutes of January 24, 2013
- Draft Transportation chapter
- Draft Historic and Cultural Resources chapter
- Draft Energy and Climate chapter

Respectfully submitted,



Christopher Rembold, Town Planner