

Great Barrington Master Plan Committee (MPC)

Minutes of November 10, 2010

1. Call to Order

Town Planner Chris Rembold called the meeting to order at 7:30 PM and welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Master Plan Committee (MPC). He announced that he is making a digital audio recording of the meeting.

Mr. Rembold indicated that several members and alternate members of the MPC have not yet been sworn in and therefore are not entitled to vote tonight. These are Donald Goranson, Jack Musgrove, David Shanahan, and Suzanne Fowle Schroeder.

Mr. Rembold asked if item 3 on the agenda could be taken up later, so that we can select officers after we learn more about each other and the process. All agreed.

Jonathan Hankin asked if minutes must be kept. Mr. Rembold said yes, and that tonight the recorder is serving that purpose. It will be transcribed later.

2. Introduction of Members

Mr. Rembold asked that everyone introduce themselves. The following members were present and spoke:

- Shep Evans, *Citizen-at-large*, of Monument Valley Road, member of the board of the Great Barrington Land Conservancy, former President of the Stockbridge Land Trust and Laurel Hill Association, and on the board of the Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions.
- Michele Gilligan, *Council on Aging*, of State Road, grew up in Great Barrington and went to local schools, is a retired a law professor.
- Walter "Bud" Atwood, *Board of Selectmen*, of Maple Avenue, lifelong resident of Great Barrington, 19 years as a school teacher, 23 years with a local insurance agency, 10 years on School Committee including former Chairman, 12 years on Finance Committee.
- Mary Beth Merritt, *Agricultural Commission*, of Long Pond Road, Chair of the Ag. Commission
- Michael Wise, *Citizen-at-large*, of Castle Street, just moved full time recently, is a retired lawyer.
- Ryan Caruso, *Citizen-at-large*, of North Plain Road, work with the Great Barrington River Walk
- Paul Ivory, *Historical Commission*, of Grove Street, worked for the National Trust for Historic Preservation for 30 years.
- Richard Dohoney, *Planning Board*, of Blue Hill Road, has been on the Planning Board for a year and is an attorney practicing in Pittsfield.
- Jack Musgrove, *Planning Board*, moved here in 2000, and a member of the Planning Board since 2003. Great Barrington is a great place to live and I hope to help keep it that way.
- Jonathan Hankin, *Planning Board*, of West Plain Road, member of the Planning Board for 13 years, a licensed architect and a real estate broker
- Bill Meier, *Citizen-at-large*, is the Aquatics Director at Simon's Rock College. He has lived here for 12 years. He has served on the Schools Construction committee and was a member of the Board Directors of the Chamber of Commerce
- Dave Shanahan, *Conservation Commission*, with his wife purchased Tamarack Farm off Route 23, which he grew up on, second term on the Conservation Commission and happy to have been able to move back to Great Barrington.

- Deb Phillips, *Board of Selectmen*, resident for 30+ years, on the Conservation Commission before being elected to the Board of Selectmen.
- Jim Clark, *Citizen-at-large*, of Housatonic, pretty much a lifelong resident, currently Principal of an architectural and project management firm

The Alternate members in attendance introduced themselves:

- Vivian Orłowski, *alternate for the Agricultural Commission*, emergency planner for the Berkshire Boards of Health, and the coordinator for the Southern Berkshire Clergy Association
- Suzie Fowle Schroeder, *alternate for the Planning Board*, of Housatonic, a wildlife biologist with two children in the local schools, lived here for past 8 years
- Barbara Bailly, *alternate for the Council on Aging*, of Housatonic; she has lived in Great Barrington for over 50 years.

The following members could not be present at the meeting:

- Karen Smith, *Parks Commission*
- Christine Ward, *alternate for the Parks Commission*
- Don Goranson, *alternate for the Planning Board*

Amy Kacala, Senior Planner with the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC), introduced herself. She has been the staff of Berkshire Regional Planning Commission for two years, with a background in comprehensive planning in private practice before moving to the Berkshires.

3. Organization of the Committee / Selection of Officers

See discussion on page 4 of these minutes.

4. Purpose of the Master Plan

Mr. Rembold began a PowerPoint presentation and handed around copies of the presentation.

He indicated that a Master Plan helps manage change, aligns our ideas, visions, and resources, and helps us respond to new challenges that have occurred over the last 15 20 years. The Master Plan is a policy document and a document that the Planning Board has for several years hoped to update. Both the Planning Board and the Board of Selectmen agree that the Master Plan will set key policy over next decade or two.

Mr. Rembold stated that the Master Plan helps us make decisions; it provides a compass. It helps us review development proposals. It provides a rational basis for land use regulations, infrastructure and spending. It is a foundational document for all other local plans.

Mr. Rembold indicated that a Master Plan can be said to be part “art” and part “science” and these must be in balance. The art is the visioning and community input; the science is the data and research analysis. They are brought together in the statement of vision and goals.

Specifically, Massachusetts General Law requires nine elements to be covered in a Master Plan. There may be additional topics for Great Barrington to include.

Mr. Rembold outlined a brief history of the Town's Master Plans. One was begun in early 1970s and completed in 1974. The 1974 plan responded to a number of issues including increasing congestion, lagging industrial economy, and new concerns about development in environmentally sensitive areas.

The existing plan was begun in the mid 1990s and published in 1997. This plan responded to increased commercial development and residential subdivisions, and established development goals that would use new and infill growth to support existing developed areas.

But since the 1997 plan the town has witnessed changes that were not anticipated at that time. Some of the same issues still remain. New national demographic and economic trends are affecting us locally. New issues like sustainability and climate change must be addressed.

Mr. Rembold stated that he would put this slide show and the maps online and will email a PDF copy to the MPC. The maps will be printed in large format for future meetings and public meetings.

5. Process of Creating the Master Plan

Mr. Rembold outlined his recommended process. He described a four phase process that starts with community engagement and data research and analysis, followed by a phase of increased input including interviews and surveys, then a phase of crafting the visions and goals, then a final phase of drafting the plan and seeking additional input.

At that close of this process, the MPC should have a final draft Master Plan that they send to the Planning Board for approval. Mr. Rembold recommends that the Selectmen also approve it, and Town Meeting as well.

Mr. Rembold will email the MPC a clearer copy of the current proposed timeline for everyone's comment.

Ms. Merritt asked if experts would be brought in to help. Mr. Rembold said that we do have funds to bring experts in if we need them, but also the MPC can form subcommittees of its own members and members of the community to be the local experts on issues.

Mr. Hankin said that the schedule shows a community meeting in February and a second in December. These would not be advantageous for getting second homeowners and vacationers involved. Mr. Shanahan indicated that weather could also be an issue.

Mr. Rembold asked everyone to consider the schedule and comment. This is something we'll have to think about.

Mr. Shanahan said that in any case communications is a serious issue—we must be able to get the word out and let people know what is going on.

Mr. Rembold asked that the MPC consider outreach and media strategies.

6. Roles and Responsibilities of Parties

Mr. Rembold reiterated that the MPC is the guiding force of this Master Plan process. He and BRPC would serve as consultants and provide the data and support that you need and request. The MPC will review the outreach strategy, the process, all drafts, etc. and formulate a final plan for the Planning Board.

Mr. Rembold asked if the Committee is prepared to choose its officers.

Ms. Merritt asked what the Chairperson's role would be. Mr. Rembold indicated that he and the Chair would work together to organize the meetings, make agendas and post notices. The Chair would run the meetings and could be the public face of the committee.

Mr. Hankin suggested that the MPC wait until next time to elect a Chair. Ms. Phillips suggested that the MPC consider two Co Chairs. It was also suggested that the MPC choose a Recording Secretary to assist with the accuracy in minute taking.

Several members indicated that they do not want to be considered for a Chairperson role. These are Mr. Dohoney, Mr. Evans, Mr. Ivory, Mr. Shanahan, and Mr. Musgrove.

Mr. Rembold asked that everyone consider this for the next meeting. Qualities of a good Chairperson include the ability to listen and guide conversations, someone who has time to organize and the focus required, and the ability to solicit input from all members.

7. Set Regular Meeting Dates and Times

The next meeting was set for Thursday, December 9, 2010, at 7:30 PM. Venue to be determined.

After that, meetings will be held on the fourth Thursday of each month, at 7:30 PM. The January meeting would be January 27, 2011.

The first order of business will be selecting the co-chairs and recording secretary.

Mr. Rembold asked the MPC to do the following in advance of the December 9 meeting:

- consider Co-Chairpersons and
- review the 1997 Master Plan
- review the June memo which reviews the 1997 Plan
- review the July memo which sets forth the proposed process
- review the proposed timeline, which he will email, and consider good dates for public forums
- review the handout of critical participants and important resources
- consider what topics might need special focus

Mr. Rembold indicated that the timeline might coordinate with BRPC's regional planning process. Ms. Kacala outlined BRPC's recent award of a major federal grant to develop a county-wide plan. It will be a three year process and Great Barrington will be the hub of all south county meetings. She suggested that this effort be synchronized well with Great Barrington's plan, so people are not confused by two concurrent processes. She said it could be an important opportunity for Great Barrington to see how it fits into the larger region before we craft own plan. The first visioning sessions for the regional plan process are scheduled for May or June 2011.

8. Adjourn

Mr. Musgrove moved to adjourn; Mr. Dohoney seconded the motion. All were in favor. The meeting adjourned at 9:00 PM.

Materials distributed or presented during this meeting:

- Agenda
- PowerPoint slide presentation
- Copies of 1997 Master Plan
- Copies of Town Planner's June 24, 2010 memo
- Copies of Town Planner's July 7, 2010 memo
- Draft list of key stakeholders and participants