

**Great Barrington Master Plan Committee (MPC)**  
Minutes of December 9, 2010

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**Call to Order**

Town Planner Chris Rembold called the meeting to order at 7:35 PM. He announced that he is making a digital audio recording of the meeting.

The following members were present (alternate members without voting power at this meeting are denoted with italics): Walter Atwood, *Barbara Bailly*, Ryan Caruso, Richard Dohoney, Shep Evans, Michele Gilligan, Jonathan Hankin, Paul Ivory, Bill Meier, Mary Beth Merritt, Jack Musgrove, *Vivian Orlowski*, Deborah Phillips, David Shanahan, Christine Ward, Michael Wise.

The following members were absent: Jim Clark, Suzanne Fowle Schroeder, Don Goranson, Karen Smith.

**Approval of Minutes of November 10, 2010**

A motion was made by Mr. Hankin to approve the minutes as amended and seconded by Mr. Evans. All in favor; none opposed.

**Organization of the Committee**

Ms. Gilligan and Mr. Wise indicated their willingness to be considered as Co-Chairs of the MPC. Mr. Wise noted that he is interested in the process of government in general, has been working in government for his whole life, and that he has not lived in town for a long time and is without a particular agenda except to support the community. Ms. Gilligan indicated her interest. She grew up here and has moved back to town on a permanent basis due to her long love of the town. But she is out of town from January to March.

Ms. Phillips nominated Mr. Wise to be a co-chair. Mr. Musgrove seconded. All were in favor. Mr. Atwood nominated Ms. Gilligan to be a co-chair. Mr. Musgrove seconded. All were in favor.

The position of recording secretary was discussed. The primary responsibility will be assisting in taking notes and minutes and ensuring that the records of meetings of the MPC are accurate. The MPC decided that it was best to rotate the responsibilities of recording secretary at each MPC meeting; this would get everyone involved in the process. Mr. Musgrove made a motion that the position rotate at each meeting, in alphabetical order. Mr. Evans seconded. Mr. Dohoney asked that the position be designated on the agenda for each meeting. All were in favor.

**Review of the 1997 Master Plan**

Mr. Rembold asked the MPC for comments regarding the 1997 Plan, stating that this would be a good starting point for discussion and learning more about each other.

Mr. Atwood stated that the 1997 Plan is a good plan and serves as a good outline to follow. There are parts that are old, and we need to see what is obsolete and what needs to be added that was not covered at the time. This gives us a good structure.

Mr. Musgrove agreed and added that an updated plan should focus more on improving the approaches and gateways into town. The plans and zoning regulations for the approaches to town make us look like

New Jersey, and he would like to look more like the Berkshires. Mr. Shanahan brought up the example that some properties like White House Square were developed to have a more traditional New England feel, in direct opposition to what is across the road. Mr. Musgrove said the Master Plan should contain a clear statement on what the town wants to see in these areas.

Ms. Phillips was pleased that the existing plan had a great amount of content regarding pedestrian access, walkability, and connectivity, but expressed her concern that the plan was simply filed on a shelf and ignored. She hopes that a new plan is actually implemented and used on a regular basis. It always needs to be the first document we look to in developments and other projects.

Mr. Wise noted that the 1997 Plan is based on old census data, with different data and economic projections. Will our current efforts be based on better data and more recent projections? Mr. Rembold stated that the timing of our efforts should coincide well with the release of 2010 census data.

Mr. Ivory focused on cultural and historical resources in his read of the 1997 Plan. He appreciated the recognition that these resources contribute to Great Barrington's appeal. He also noted that plan gave a good description of goals and tools that could be used. For this plan we should focus more on so-called "smart growth" practices to enhance these resources, and we should also keep the plan up to date, perhaps with a subcommittee to make sure that happens.

Ms. Orłowski thought it was a good document but that it did not relate Great Barrington to the larger forces in the economy and environment, such as global warming, which could affect basic assumptions about the way we live. Our assumptions about where our food comes from, for example, and our assumptions that our economy can be based on cheap fossil fuels are fragile. In this changing world we cannot repeat this oversight of the old plan. Ms. Merritt followed up by stating that the new plan should not focus on agriculture and open space just for their tourist value, but also because they are vital to food supply and local economies. Mr. Shanahan added that we need to plan for alternative ways of getting into town and getting around town.

Mr. Meier agreed with these feelings but added that we need to consider a spectrum of possibilities. We need to be able to plan for various scenarios.

Mr. Atwood stated that we need to understand how and why people come here. Tourists and second home owners are important but are different parts of our economy. We need to have both to be stable.

Mr. Meier asked that the plan guide future development so that the town is a leader in green technologies and other groundbreaking things that will attract young people here.

Mr. Shanahan agreed and said that one of these things might be different transportation options that will make Great Barrington more attractive and easier to get to. Also, when oil gets more expensive we might see a return to small scale family based agriculture.

Ms. Phillips stated that while that is important, we need to look simultaneously at keeping Great Barrington affordable to live and work in. This also ties into how we preserve space, and how we restrict or allow development in sensitive areas. Affordability, open space, and a good economy need to be balanced.

Mr. Hankin thought the 1997 Plan did not focus much on the village of Housatonic. He does not want it to get lost and overlooked. We need to focus a lot of thought and energy on the village.

Ms. Gilligan said that she and Ms. Bailly have discussed that the plan must also recognize the issue of an aging population, and plan for alternative transportation and senior housing.

Ms. Merritt questioned that many plans have a basic assumption that growth is always good. We need to be able to debate that assumption, and perhaps focus more locally. Also, we need to be mindful of adding new facilities and thus more tax burden on people.

Mr. Rembold suggested that all the plan's policies will have to be balanced on the question of how we meet our future needs. It will be difficult, in light of tighter budgets and perhaps smaller markets, to grow our way out of problems.

Mr. Evans reiterated the smart growth issue. A healthy environment means more respect for intact natural habitats, for less expensive housing, for well-sited housing, and less subdivisions, pointing to using what we already have in a better way, and not necessarily building new.

Mr. Meier agreed with Mr. Evans and Ms. Gilligan, and reiterated that we also need to focus on cultivating an atmosphere for younger people. We have arts and culture, but we need to embrace recreational and scenic resources that will attract younger folks and could provide jobs. Great Barrington could be a mecca for younger people. We should protect and promote these outdoor areas.

Ms. Bailly believes the issue of industry needs to be addressed. We need a source of jobs to keep people here. Mr. Atwood mentioned the state effort to get broadband internet access available to the Berkshires. This could add possibilities for new industries, cottage industries, small businesses and those things.

Mr. Atwood also added that we need maps that show where we can and cannot develop, whether floodplains or state land. We need to be aware of these constraints when we start talking about industry and new development, housing, and other things. Mr. Shanahan called it an inventory of land in town. Mr. Rembold stated that in the coming meetings he would be presenting maps like this.

Mr. Dohoney echoed that we need to have good data on which to base assumptions. If our economy is not going to be driven by new development, we need to figure out what will drive our town. Our master plan has to be able to look at and plan for all of the economic trends and shifts—neither pure tourism nor pure development.

Mr. Caruso said that he thinks a great deal on amenities for young people and young families, particularly parks, trails, playgrounds, sidewalks, and transportation options. The plan should also look at putting derelict buildings back into productive use.

Ms. Ward stressed that we cannot think of our resources in isolation, but rather how they are connected to each other. Connections can be physical connections, but also connections to each other and our community. In terms of having a master plan that gets put into action, we should see that the plan actually assigns its strategies to specific committees or areas of the town government to see that those things happen.

Finally, Mr. Hankin noted that, as a real estate broker, he sees that people moving to the area are looking for cellular phone and high speed internet. These, and the tax rate, are critical. Many people rule out Great Barrington based on taxes when they compare us to other towns. Mr. Atwood stated that we might need to look at sharing services and personnel amongst towns.

## **Review Proposed Master Plan Update Process, Outreach Strategy, and Timeline**

Mr. Rembold asked that the MPC consider agenda items 5 and 6 together at this time. He asked if the MPC had comments on the scope and process.

Regarding the draft scope of service memo, Ms. Phillips asked why the Planning Board and Town Planner are always listed as the “team” for each item. Mr. Rembold said that now that this MPC is in place, the MPC will take the lead role with Town Planner support.

Mr. Wise said that the draft schedule compresses the surveys and workshops—the key elements of outreach—into three months, while six months are allocated to drafting the plan itself. Perhaps we can reverse those. Mr. Rembold agreed. We should spend much more time on the outreach phase of the plan.

Mr. Rembold passed out a new proposed master plan schedule that shows how our tasks are stretched out to coincide with Berkshire Regional Planning’s process for the regional plan.

Mr. Ivory had several suggestions about businesses to add to the outreach and key participant list. We should add Housatonic village businesses, Hazen Paper, and Butternut. Also the DuBois Homesite and Upper Housatonic Heritage Corridors should be added to historic interest groups.

Ms. Gilligan asked that non-profits, particularly those that deal with free food, be added to the list. They provide services for the homeless and elderly and others. And they need space. Ms. Ward added Volunteers in Medicine, the Nutrition Center, and pediatricians to the Health group. Ms. Phillips added East Mountain Medical.

Ms. Orłowski added Berkshire County Boards of Health Association. She provided an email print out of other groups to be added, including economic development groups like the local CDC and the county wide 1 Berkshire, utility providers like Berkshire Gas and the Fire and Water District. Greenagers was also added. Ms. Ward added Sculpture Now to the arts group.

Mr. Ivory asked that media like the radio stations be added to the list. Mr. Rembold responded that the MPC should discuss a media strategy soon, perhaps at the next meeting.

Mr. Evans proposed the MA Dept. of Fish and Wildlife and the Housatonic Valley Association be added.

## **Timeline and Coordination with Regional Planning**

Mr. Rembold recommended that the MPC revise our timeline to coincide better with Berkshire Regional Planning’s region plan schedule. We would gain in many ways, including have timely access to data and being able to better coordinate our plans with what we know of where the region is going. This would stretch the process longer. All were in agreement.

Mr. Rembold stated that he would revise the schedule based on tonight’s discussions.

## **Other Issues and Concerns**

Ms. Orłowski reminded everyone that there was a public meeting on Thursday December 16 at 6:00 at the Mason Library about the regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).

She also mentioned the Housatonic River PCB issue and GE’s identification of land in Housatonic as a possible waste dump. Ms. Gilligan stated that the EPA is using a consultant to facilitate discussion and he

is seeking people who have input or know of those who should be interviewed. She gave his contact phone number and email address.

**Next Meeting**

Both Mr. Wise and Ms. Gilligan said they would be out of town in late January, so the fourth Thursday will not work as a meeting date.

The MPC agreed to change the next meeting date to Thursday January 13, at 7:30 PM.

Mr. Rembold will send a reminder to everyone.

**Adjournment**

At 9:00 PM, Mr. Musgrove moved to adjourn. Mr. Hankin seconded. All were in favor.