

## **Great Barrington Master Plan Committee (MPC)**

Minutes of February 24, 2011

Great Barrington Fire Station

37 State Road, Great Barrington

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The meeting was called to order at 7:30pm by Co-Chairperson Michael Wise

He announced that the meeting was being recorded. He directed members to sign in on the sheet outside the door.

Members present (alternate members without voting power at this meeting are denoted with *italics*): Donald Goranson (Alternate) Jonathan Hankin, *Vivian Orłowski (Alternate)*, Mary Beth Merritt, Ryan Caruso, Paul Ivory, Jim Clark, Bill Meier, Shep Evans, Barbara Bailly (acting recording secretary), David Shanahan, Deb Philips, Bud Atwood, Jack Musgrove.

Members absent: Richard Dohoney, Michelle Gilligan, Karen Smith, Suzie Fowle-Schroeder, and Christine Ward

### **Minutes of January 13, 2011**

Mr. Hankin made the motion to accept the minutes. Mr. Musgrove seconded the motion. All in favor. None opposed.

### **Additional Plan Resources**

Mr. Rembold reminded the MPC that he sent the weblink to the Town budget proposed for Fiscal Year 2012, that voters would be asked to approve at the May Town Meeting. He indicated in particular the Town Manager's introduction to the budget, which contains a wealth of useful and current information on the state of Town finances and future capital improvements that will be required over the next several decades. He urged all members to review this document.

He also referenced the Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP). It was too large to print out for everyone, so he directed everyone to the Town website (both the Conservation Commission page and the Master Plan page). The Master Plan will have a chapter or focus area on open space and recreation.

### **Existing Conditions Presentation**

Mr. Rembold presented a PowerPoint slideshow on Land Use and Zoning, as the first session in which the MPC reviews existing conditions. He said he would not be discussing demographics tonight, as municipal level 2010 Census data has not been released. When it is, we will turn back to this topic and have current data.

He stated the intent of reviewing past data and existing conditions data is to help inform the future in part by articulating the recent past. He referred to 1974 maps regarding Land Use and Zoning. The maps used showed both private and public land use. The land use indicated that future growth in residential use would depend on the use and availability of sewer and water. Ms. Merritt asked what the maps show and is the 69% of forest land more public or private. Mr. Rembold replied that the maps and development projections were on target and within the 46 square miles that comprise Great Barrington 69% of the area is forested land at present. He noted that development in the postwar period began to be more spread out from central areas and tended to be on larger lots. This trend has used a tremendous amount of outlying

lands for new development, and the trend continues until today. He referred to the effect of this on open spaces and agricultural lands. Mr. Hankin asked whether there were any attempts through zoning to control this development. Mr. Rembold referred to the zoning proposals of the 1974 and 1997 plans which have had limited success. A map of structures built since the 1980s showed 650 new buildings added through 2005. These are represented by all of the red dots on the map. The average acreage for each new lot was about seven acres per lot. Mr. Evans asked whether we have median acreage data, rather than the average, so that the largest and smallest parcel don't skew the numbers.

Mr. Rembold presented a current land use map, compiled based on state aerial imagery data. It reflects how development has shaped our land use. Subsequent slides presented statistics about land use, including percent forest, percent agricultural, and percent developed as residential and commercial. These statistics are also based on aerial image data. A subsequent slide detailed land use per parcels, with data compiled by the Assessor's data. This data shows quite a different picture than the aerial imagery data (e.g. over 30 percent of the total acreage in Town being classified as residential per the Assessor data, versus only 6 percent classified as residential per the aerial imagery data).

Further data on land use by parcel classification showed that of the 279 new parcels in town since 1990, most, 222 of them, are single family residential. There has been a significant decline in the number of multi-family parcels (58 fewer), which could reflect a general decline in lower cost housing options over the last two decades.

The next portion of the presentation focused on zoning regulations. As of 1971, most of the Town was zoned minimum of one-acre residential. Some environmentally sensitive areas near Round Pond (Mercer Pond) allowed very dense development, on ¼-acre lots. With development pressures mounting and zoning regulations that did not call for sensitive development, the 1974 plan proposed to protect environmentally sensitive and scenic areas, and proposed, as a balance, to allow for higher density zoning where there was already municipal water and sewer service.

Through the 1980s and 1990s, the face of the zoning map changed very little. By the mid 1990s, when the 1997 Master Plan was being written, zoning began to promote compact development, attempted to restrict more traffic-generating development in the highway areas, and attempted to strengthen the downtown by creating new regulations for parking and restaurants, for example. A transitional zone between business and residential zoning, was added at the northern end of Stockbridge Road, and, last year, a special overlay district was added to downtown Great Barrington, to allow for mixed-use development. However, the overall zoning map itself has remained rather static, from the 1970s through today.

Mr. Hankin stated that when zoning districts were first drawn, they were drawn to incorporate, and mirror, the land uses and neighborhoods at the time. The zoning basically codified what the historical agricultural, residential, and commercial/industrial development trends were—with industrial uses along the river and railroads, businesses at hamlets and major crossroads, etc. Mr. Rembold said this is an important observation—the way Great Barrington looks today was established at least as much by geographic features as by any land use regulations. Zoning does not work in isolation.

Mr. Hankin suggested that a purpose of the Master Plan would be helped by a map showing areas of conservation, and asked whether we should be targeting areas for conservation. Mr. Shanahan and Ms. Phillips commented that the Open Space Plan shows these areas. Mr. Wise suggested that our maps should show land use, zoning, population density, special environmental areas, etc., so we can flip back and forth between these maps and show relationships between them. The committee agreed that identifying key areas for preservation should be an integral aspect of the master plan.

Ms. Merritt wondered if new standards of practice in development should be brought to our community. Mr. Rembold stated we would consider best practices and state of the art tools, like special overlay districts, that will help us coordinate our land use and preservation goals. Mr. Wise said he feels zoning maps and regulations function to define the starting point, or the argument, for how and where development can happen. But we may need to revisit the machinery on how these things get done. Mr. Hankin stated that overlay zones are helpful in this sense because they allow more flexibility.

Mr. Clark asked how changes in zoning are initiated, and if they should be tailored to specific places. He was informed that any change must be accepted by a two-thirds town meeting vote. Mr. Musgrove and Mr. Goranson said that there is an interplay to be explored—the zoning map and regulations should reflect what people want to happen in a particular place, but should be tempered with what a developer thinks might be practical in the real world. Mr. Clark said it is very important to first hear from people what they want. Mr. Wise pointed out that a long term plan should reflect what people want but we need to be flexible. Mr. Goranson said that there is a constant evolution in the marketplace, in the real world. That's why we propose changes every year at Town Meeting.

### **Subcommittees**

Mr. Wise asked members to volunteer to focus on specific topics of the Master Plan, and we set up working groups or subcommittees on each topic. Ms. Philips suggested that individuals work on an area that they would like to know more about and not necessarily what they know.

Ms. Merritt pointed out that through the Agricultural Commission process—Keep Farming—its members focus not only on Agriculture, but Natural Resources, Economic Development, and Open Space and Aesthetics. And the Ag Comm process will have excellent tools and resources to work on these issues.

Agriculture: Merritt, Orlowski

Circulation/Traffic: Atwood, Hankin

Economic Development: Wise, Ivory, Phillips

Housing: Ward, Ivory, Bailly

Implementation: Wise

Land Use: Shanahan, Hankin

Natural & Cultural resources: Caruso, Ivory

Open space & Recreation: Caruso, Evans, Meier

Services & Facilities: Atwood, Shanahan, Bailly, Clark

Members who were not in attendance will fill in other topics as necessary.

Mr. Rembold will provide the various subcommittees resources and specific assignments. Each group will meet individually and discuss the knowledge gained and educate others. These groups will also be sensitive to drafting questions for surveys and outreach on these topics.

### **Participation and Outreach Update**

Mr. Rembold met with Ms. Orlowski and Ms. Smith, our media mavens, to discuss outreach strategies, media strategies, and branding. Small events, focused on each area of town, were suggested as an innovative outreach method. Each MPC member could host / set up a house party type event in each neighborhood.

Mr. Meier remarked that the 1997 Plan supported increased use of bikes throughout the town. He felt that business should encourage their employees to the benefit of bike riding, and an event focused on

something like that could help promote our work. Mr. Atwood said events like the car show might have a lane dedicated for bikes. Ms. Phillips said Trails and Greenways events could recognize the last master plan and promote the future plan. Mr. Rembold said he would continue working on media and messaging, and coordinate with the 250 Anniversary Committee events.

Ms. Merritt suggested that we get information regarding our meetings to both radio and newspaper outlets. We need to get the word out soon or it will be too late. Mr. Rembold said we could ramp up efforts with the newspaper and interest groups.

Mr. Rembold mentioned that our work is coinciding with the Regional Planning process. The public meeting will be held in July.

### **Other Issues**

Ms. Orlowski informed the group of a Sustainability Communities seminar to be held April 15<sup>th</sup> in Marlborough, MA. It is \$60 per person.

Mr. Merritt raised a general question if this plan should reconcile whether recent activity in selling buildings reflects what the community actually wants to see in those buildings, or whether a hold be put on the selling of buildings. Mr. Wise responded by saying that our charge is to focus on future issues, not necessarily stop everything while we do that work. Other boards are currently focusing on those present activities to make sure they happen in the town's best interests.

### **Adjourn**

On a motion by Mr. Hankin, second by Mr. Atwood, all in favor, the meeting adjourned at 9:15 PM.

### **Next Meeting**

March 24th at 7:30pm, at the Fire Station.