

Great Barrington Master Plan Committee (MPC)

Minutes of March 24, 2011

Great Barrington Fire Station
37 State Road, Great Barrington

The meeting was called to order at 7:30pm by Co-Chairperson Michelle Gilligan

She announced that the meeting was being recorded. She 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*): Jonathan Hankin, *Vivian Orłowski (Alternate)*, Christine Ward, Ryan Caruso (acting recording secretary), Paul Ivory, Jim Clark, Bill Meier, Shep Evans, Richard Dohoney, Karen Smith, Deb Philips, Bud Atwood, Jack Musgrove.

Members absent: Barbara Bailly, David Shanahan, Donald Goranson, and Suzie Fowle-Schroeder

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

Subcommittee Assignments

Mr. Rembold informed the MPC of upcoming assignments and homework tasks. He discussed the role of subcommittees and their operational objectives, citing himself, the Planning Board, DPW, and other town services as resources for subcommittee members. In addition, more resources would be made available through the town website. He also set a tentative date of May 11 as the assignment deadline.

Mr. Dohoney and Mr. Musgrove were noted for being unassigned to any of the subcommittees and asked if they had any particular choice. Mr. Musgrove asked to be added to the Housing Subcommittee, while Mr. Dohoney remained temporarily unassigned. Other pre-assigned subcommittee members opted to be added to other subcommittees, including Mrs. Ward who asked to be added to the Open Space and Recreation Subcommittee, and Mr. Evans who asked to be added to the Housing and Natural and Cultural Resources Subcommittees.

Mr. Ivory raised the point of format for submitting subcommittee documents to Mr. Rembold. Mr. Rembold indicated that a summary format followed by bullets highlighting major points would be sufficient.

Mrs. Orłowski expressed an interest in maintaining interaction between the Keep Farming Initiative and the MPC.

Outreach and Schedule Update

Mr. Rembold discussed the present status of the outreach efforts of the MPC and collective media efforts of Mrs. Orłowski and Mrs. Smith. He unveiled the new logo designed by a local artist that presents both Housatonic and Great Barrington linked by bridge and rail over the Housatonic River. Mrs. Smith

questioned the coloring of the new logo and expressed her opinion that it should be changed to something more media-friendly.

Mr. Rembold indicated that the first forum should be anticipated and that the MPC should begin planning for the event. He indicated that a time slot near the July 4th holiday weekend should be when the forum is held. Media efforts promoting the MPC and forum would begin in June.

Existing Conditions Presentation

Mr. Rembold opened his presentation by discussing population trends in Great Barrington and the Berkshires. Recent census data and statistics showed a steady decline for the town and county alike, while neighboring regions showed increases. Other slides indicated relative household sizes, noting that Great Barrington had considerably smaller households than the rest of the country. Racial and ethnic statistics showed a slight increase in diversity for the town, despite the decline in population.

The second part of the presentation focused on housing. Statistics from the 2000 Census indicate that while Great Barrington has a high number of second homes as compared to neighboring towns, it is not high on a percentage basis as in neighboring towns. Statistical data also shows that a large percentage of housing is of older pre-1930s stock, with a very low percentage of new housing; this directly tied-in to an increase in housing costs as a percentage of monies spent on upkeep. Housing costs have also increased at a rapid rate, up until the real estate market crash in late 2008, but have since started rising again.

The third and final part of the presentation focused on the economic status of the town. Data showed an increase of roughly \$10,000 in median household income over the past decade. Industry data showed that the region was extremely reliant on healthcare and education as the primary sources of employment and/or economic revenue. Classification of workers indicated that most trends matched that of national patterns, except in the area of self-employment, which was comparatively higher. Overall employment trends dropped lower, thereby increasing unemployment levels to an all-time high for the county.

In summation it was noted that the population, both county and town, were losing population. This was attributed to factors such as lack of employers and a declining economy. The county also has older adults and much fewer youth, with many younger people moving away after high school. Household sizes have diminished as the number of housing units has increased, albeit by a small margin. Great Barrington's housing density was greater than neighboring towns, and fifty-percent of the population lives in either downtown or Housatonic.

Neither the town or county are diverse when compared with more metropolitan areas, but diversity has increased nonetheless with growing minority populations. Vacancy rates for the town have stabilized while those for Housatonic have decreased. Older housing is a drain on family budgets in regards to upkeep. Real estate costs countywide are considered affordable, while Great Barrington's values have increased exponentially. As these real estate costs have increased, incomes have not kept pace.

Town residents earn more than the county average but less than neighboring regions. Economic activity is concentrated in only a few areas and not diversified. Higher paying jobs remain extremely scarce while lower paying jobs are in abundance. A large number of residents are self-employed, which may be attributed to either entrepreneurship or a lack of stable, steady employment. Agriculture accounts for a significant proportion of the local economy but provides significantly less profits than neighboring areas. Education levels are generally lower than neighboring areas, but have nonetheless seen an increase.

Key Issues: Break-Out and Report

Mrs. Gilligan indicated that not enough time was remaining of the meeting to allow for this topic to be discussed. As such, this topic was postponed until the next meeting.

Other Issues

Mr. Rembold discussed the Photo Exercise for Subcommittees form which was handed out at the meeting. He encouraged all MPC members to review the document and submit photos by April 28th.

Adjourn

On a motion by Mrs. Gilligan, seconded by Mr. Dohoney, all in favor, the meeting adjourned at 9:10 PM.

Next Meeting

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