

**Master Plan Steering Committee (MPSC)  
& Focus Group Meeting**

**Draft Minutes of April 6, 2010**

Ms. Gibson-Quigley called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

The following members of the Steering Committee were present:

Members Present: Patrick Babcock, Charles Blanchard, Sandra Gibson-Quigley, Chair, Steve Dalberth, Penny Dumas, Heather Hart, Chris Rovezzi, Bruce Smith, Maryann Thorpe and Arnold Wilson.

Members Absent: Alan Curboy, Heather Hendrick and Matt Rousseau

Staff: Diane Trapasso, Administrative Assistant

Consultants: Michael Casino and Darren Mochrie, RKG Associates

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

It was decided by the Committee to hold off on voting on the minutes of March 2<sup>nd</sup> to the next meeting.

DRAFT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CHAPTER

Mr. Casino and Mr. Mochrie of RKG reviewed the Draft Economic Development Element and the Economic Concepts Map and presented the findings of the Business Survey.

The consultants stressed that this is a working draft and want input and recommendations from the Board. Information for this section was gathered from available data, input from the public forum, interviews with stakeholders, and the Business Survey.

REVIEW OF BUSINESS SURVEY

The intent of this survey was to insure that businesses were included in the public input for the plan, to gain an understanding of various conditions and factors affecting their operation, and to solicit direction for future economic development efforts.

The survey mailing was based on a list of Sturbridge businesses obtained from the Town Clerk's Office that includes all businesses required to obtain a bi-annual license to operate in the town. A total of 446 surveys with good contact information were distributed.

Overall, a total of 67 survey responses were received. This represents a response rate of 15% which is considered acceptable for a survey of this type.

## ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

The economic conditions examined in this chapter reviews changes at the local level in Sturbridge and places these changes with the context of the regional and state economies. The first portion of the chapter reviews overall employment growth over the last decade and also presents a detailed perspective regarding changes and trends within major industry sectors. These historical trends are followed by a discussion of projected employment growth at the state level and how Sturbridge may be affected by these forecasts.

The second portion of the chapter discusses characteristics of the town's labor force and how they have changed over the past decade. This is followed by an examination of land use trends for commercial and industrial development and a discussion of strategic opportunity areas that will play a key role in the town's future economic development activities.

The Consultants went through the following sections of the Economic Condition:

- Historic Employment Trends
  1. Establishments
  2. Wages
- Employment Projections
- Labor Force Characteristics
- Tourism
- Nonresidential Development Trends
- Municipal Tax Base
- Strategic Opportunity Areas
  1. Strategic Planning Focal Points
  2. Strategic Opportunities and Issues
    - Economic Development Oversight & Implementation
    - Diversified Economic Base
    - Growth in Health Care Demand
    - Highway System
    - Utility Systems
    - Regional Development & Collaboration
- Conclusions and Recommended Actions
  1. Foster economic sustainability by focusing on growth and expansion of existing businesses through implementation of pro-business policies and regulations, financing infrastructure construction and cooperative marketing efforts.
  2. Promote economic development from a regional perspective

3. Prepare a Corridor Improvement Plan for the Commercial/Tourist District

Work with MassHighway  
Work with property owners  
Be as flexible as possible  
See what a building is worth before renovating or redeveloping

4. Create new Entertainment Gateway district on Route 20

5. Expand Business/Industrial zoning on west end of Route 20

6. Create new mixed use, medical zone on Route 131

7. Revise purpose and development requirements of Special Use District

Need to figure out what and how Route 15 should look like

8. Other Zoning/Regulatory Related Issues

The Committee recommendations and concerns are the following:

- Note that the areas zoned as Industrial have other limitations, such as wetlands, etc.
- Be concerned with filling the empty buildings first, then concentrate on new zoning districts
- How do we get businesses to come to Sturbridge and stay
- Work with other Towns for the better of Sturbridge
- The Planning Board has started to implement the Commercial/Tourist District Revitalization Study
- Create a new Entertainment Gateway district on Route 20 – the word “Gateway” needs to be removed. It is confusing with the Gateway to Sturbridge to be as you get off the Pike
- The rezoning of land across Rout 20 from Technology Park businesses for industrial uses – problem is wetlands
- How do we want Route 15 look in ten years
- Concern with the rezoning of the land at the Publick House – how to keep the character of the Town Common

The Committee thought that a lot of good information came out of the survey and in general is pleased with the Economic Conditions draft for the Master Plan.

A concern from an audience member was brought forth noting that the draft report mentions the Southbridge proposed Energy Park, and that VHB is working with Casella and the Town of Southbridge’s waste management. The concern raised was with a potential or perceived conflict of interest.

Ms. Gibson-Quigley stated that VHB is a large company with different departments and are not working together. VHB planning is working on the Master Plan and their building department is working on the other project. The consultants from RKG stated they were unaware of any VHB involvement with such projects.

#### NEXT STEPS

- ❖ Ms. Gibson-Quigley stated that the residential survey is going out April 9, 2010 and to be returned April 26, 2010.
- ❖ Ms. Gibson-Quigley stated that at the next meeting, the following Focus Groups need to be filled with a member from the Steering Committee, who will Chair that group:
  1. Open Space & Recreation
  2. Natural, Cultural, Historic Resources
  3. Energy & Sustainability
  4. Transportation

#### NEXT MEETING

May 11, 2010 at 6:30 p.m. at the Senior Center

On a motion made by Mr. Blanchard, seconded by Ms. Thorpe and voted 8-0 the meeting adjourned at 9:05 PM.