

WASHINGTON PLANNING BOARD
Town Center Vision Subcommittee – Working meeting Minutes

August 22, 2018

Members present: Lolly Gilbert, Jim Crandall, Roxy Otterson, Jean Kluk, Andrew Hatch, Ron Jager, Kevin Provencher, Bert Bodnar and Nan Schwartz.

Visitors: Penny Whitman and Jared Reynolds

1.0 **Call to Order** - The meeting was called to order by Co-Chair Jim Crandall at 9:30 AM, in the Town Hall. We met a half hour earlier than the arrival of Whitman and Reynolds to discuss their First Impressions program and what they could offer us for assistance.

2.0 Kluk explained what she knew of the First Impressions program. It is an exchange program where you are matched with another town to look at their downtown and give your impression and input on improvements. We don't think we can do this but we are hoping maybe we could get a group of student to assess the town center, like they did in Dover. Kluk said they are coming to talk to us about any assistance they can give us. We can ask if there could be a tie in with the Capstone program at UNH in the Engineering, Communications and Design Departments. Gilbert wants to ask about community engagement and Kluk wants to share our list of issues with them. Gilbert feels outsiders can help identify things that we can't see. Kluk mentioned the software app that Whitman developed, called LoveSullivan. It has photos with GPS coordinates from all over the county. She thought you could use it to create a self-guided tour of historic sites in Washington.

Jared Reynolds arrived explained what that he focuses on the community economic development field as a specialist and mostly works in Merrimack county. He is working with Bradford on visioning and economic development. Hatch said there is a lot of new activity in town, new people moving in with new eyes on the town. Crandall said our group started off with a mandate and came up a list of issues and are looking for ideas. Penny Whitman wondered what is behind the wanting to make changes. Do we want more people to come to town, tourism or new businesses? Kluk said historic preservation, we are proud of our historic sites but some are neglected. Jager said that behind the changes were perceived problems. Gilbert added that parking isn't designated or well accessible. Whitman asked if signage was needed? Provencher said there is a plethora of signs but no cohesion, the town is not easily walkable and we would like it to be more friendly. Kluk said we need to pinpoint our assets and opportunities and have a new set of eyes; we need to do community engagement on these. She mentioned that tour busses come to see the Seventh Day Adventist church and then come to the middle of town. Gilbert said she walks and the shoulders are uneven but are walkable. Whitman identified visitor management and walkability as an issue. Reynolds asked what the barrier is to moving forward? Crandall said that we shouldn't dictate our ideas to the public; we should get more input from them, selling the ideas to the Board of Selectmen and a realization that we need to sell to the public. Kluk asked if we are missing something? Whitman asked where we have gotten over the subcommittee meetings we have held? Kluk said the social media reaction to our blue-sky issue list was an eye opener; we changed focus to something more accepted by the town. Whitman suggested broader engagement, maybe hold a workshop. Kluk mentioned a PlanNH charrette. Crandall asked where we get the money to do something like that?

Reynolds said we need community wide buy in, resources and technical advice, he asked if we want increased tourism? Whitman said we have strengths, historic assets, no signage and unplanned layout impacting the town center. Hatch mentioned the artisan's group and their self-directed tours; there is a lot of interest in that. We want a vibrant town without changing the character. At the General Store new energy came in and there is an uptick in visits but with that new issues come up. Kluk said there is historic richness in town, which we need a vehicle for, maybe a self-guided tour, maybe an online app could be utilized. Whitman asked about the

Historical Society. Bodnar said they have three sites; the museum, the barn and the E. Washington schoolhouse. They lack volunteers. They get local speakers and speakers from the state humanities organization at their monthly meetings but maybe we need a visitors' center or a map with sites on it. Whitman felt the Historical Society is an opportunity. Gilbert said new people are moving in but they don't join things. Reynolds asked how we picked our committee. Crandall said we looked for people who were interested and those who would work. Gilbert said younger people did join but then didn't show up. Jared asked what we are looking for from them? Kluk said feedback. Hatch asked about First Impressions. Whitman said that First Impressions is community to community based and Jared thought it wasn't a good fit for us. He said he could help us outside that program and they can do things in a lot of different ways; look at the components of a village center and help push us forward on what we are looking to do. He suggested visioning; step back and look at assets and opportunities, he could do 3 to 4 meetings including education, visioning and active planning. He said an asset list is needed. Bodnar asked when is the best time for community involvement? We need to get oppositional people to the table and involved. Otterson suggested getting students involved. Whitman thought this was a good idea, let people know we are going through a process with Extension and invite people to come, engage the larger community and let their voices be heard. Hatch said we have a summer community and a year-round community and the summer community seems more engaged. Jager had a concern that we are thinking to abstract, he feels we should come up with idealized solutions for issues and let the public respond to a definite project or plan, get buy in or modify it, concrete solutions to concrete problems, don't bring the public in too early. He would like to bring 1 or 2 things to Town Meeting. Bodnar asked when we should bring in the public, before or after concrete plans. Gilbert felt we should let the public help identify the issues. Jager wants serious thoughtful buy in for concrete issues. Reynolds said people want a sense of putting in their thoughts, Whitman agreed, you need many ideas to boil down to the ones that are important. Kluk said the subcommittee has made progress; we have working in many areas. Provencher suggested a survey to send to residents and ask for input. Reynolds suggested both a survey and a workshop. He suggested as an alternative to the survey you could put up posters that people could write on. Bodnar suggested putting boxes around town where people could drop their ideas in. We all agreed we need good engagement. Kluk asked if they could give guidance on a survey and Whitman said yes. We could introduce the boxes at Town Meeting. Bodnar feels we should get the town engaged soon. Provencher likes the idea of getting engagement first. Otterson agreed, she wants to get people involved and maybe meet with the kids at school. Reynolds suggested partnering with a teacher. Kluk said that when we did the Master Plan survey we were afraid of people answering many times and skewing the result. Whitman said not to be afraid of corruption, don't over control, it shows a lack of trust. Otterson agreed that we shouldn't worry about the box getting stuffed. Whitman said you are looking for a cohesive, vibrant community that is more connected as a result; these are 2 benefits of the process.

We talked about next steps which include talking about engagement, talking internally, an educational session about functional downtowns, thinking technically and internal visioning. Kluk said we should do education first and our own identification of assets. Reynolds asked if we could do a walking tour and education on the village center.

Schwartz asked if we should do anything prior to their next visit? Whitman said we should think about adding people to the subcommittee that are outside of this group with different ideas.

Whitman talked about her program "LoveSullivan" which is a pride campaign for Sullivan County, bit.ly/LoveSullivan (which is case sensitive) or <https://unhcoopext.maps.arcgis.com/apps/StoryMapCrowdsourcing/index.html?appid=f57fae9b93cf44f1ab7af72e2ea56b7f>, they are looking to identify what people love about Sullivan County and their favorite places and things to do. It is map based and you can submit pictures of interesting spots with their gps points to pinpoint them on the county map. They would love to add more points in Washington.

Kluk said we could do a news blast about the next meeting and promote LoveSullivan to the town.

3.0 **Next meeting** – Wednesday, September 5th at 10:00AM in the Town Hall, meeting with Penny Whitman and Jared Reynolds from UNH Cooperative Extension.

Meeting adjourned at 11:55 AM.

Respectfully submitted,
Nan Schwartz
Planning Board Secretary