

WASHINGTON PLANNING BOARD
Town Center Vision Subcommittee – Working meeting Minutes

January 11, 2019

Members present: Lolly Gilbert, Roxy Otterson, Kevin Provencher, Andrew Hatch, Ron Jager, and Nan Schwartz, Jim Crandall attended by phone.

Visitors: Penny Whitman, Jared Reynolds and Mollie Kaylor.

1.0 **Call to Order** - The meeting was called to order by Co-Chair Lolly Gilbert at 9:00 AM in the Town Hall.

Gilbert asked if there were any changes to the minutes, no one requested changes and the minutes were approved.

2.0 Gilbert opened the meeting and made introductions to the committee. Penny Whitman and Jared Reynolds introduced Mollie Kaylor. Kaylor explained that she wears two hats; she works for the state office of Economic Development as a resource specialist for Sullivan County connecting towns with resources and research. She is also a program manager for Northern Borders Regional Commission (NBRC) where she deals with federal grants to benefit towns in the region. Gilbert said that the plan for today was to go over the report from Penny and Jared. She said we are thinking of putting out suggestion boxes for public input and said we have a draft of the box to look at. Whitman thinks we move quickly to get things going.

Whitman said they have talked to their colleagues at work that asked why we are doing this exercise. She said there is a sense that we want to leverage what we have but what is motivating us. Hatch said that grant funding requires valid reasons and we are trying to pull things together into a concept of “Town Center”, this wouldn’t be a legal separation but an idea of place. Gilbert said this grew out of the Master Plan and projecting forward what the town should be. Hatch said that he wants to retain a sense of place; he has seen a downturn in the center and a subsequent up turn. He feels that more commercial space wouldn’t be what we are pushing for. The store is the center of discussion in town. They are open to having a suggestion box and the attitudes there have softened a bit. Provencher thinks that what we are trying to do is make life better for the people who live here and improve their quality of life. He feels the store benefits all of us and what we are doing will benefit them. Gilbert said there are a number of tourists who come through and we want them to know where to go and what to look at. Otterson said she wants to maintain a lot of what we have; good diversity, a variety of interests, not add more businesses and grow in ways that the people here won’t be interested and want to leave. Hatch said we are often guilty of thinking that the way things are here and now have always been, but things change over time. Otterson said that if we grow significantly we lose what makes things special. Safety is important to her and she feels 10 more stores wouldn’t make it better. When her kids were young she felt comfortable letting them walk to the store alone, she wants to keep that feel. She loves what is here, the farm, the community garden, and the artists. Gilbert pointed out that some things are new like the community garden. Otterson doesn’t want massive growth. She worked in Hillsboro and it was a vibrant community and it grew in a bad way. She then worked in Antrim and they had that spirit of community. Penny said the feeling is that if we change things we will lose what we have. Otterson said that the best place to invest is in the kids, get them involved and engage them. Schwartz said we can do outreach to the school. Penny said we need to remember why we got started. Gilbert said that because of our effort there is the possibility of things happening on the Old Schoolhouse. The BoS are now working with the architect that Provencher brought to us. Jared asked how we want to change at the margins but keep the sense of who we are. Gilbert said that the store has more business now at dinnertime because of changes they made and serving beer and wine. Jared said we should look at the ideas as a starting point. Penny thought we did a great job on the assessment process. In the report she identified themes and findings. She explained the color-coding she used for the chart; red was a lot of attention and comments, lots of energy indicating areas of opportunity. The yellow section is good opportunity but less attention paid to. The green section is the things we are already doing well on. She sees

this as a prioritization tool; we can find some easy wins and the sweet spots to focus on. She said the assessors didn't identify as many assets, we were hard on ourselves. Hatch said he thinks the report need some editing and would like to have it out for Town Meeting. Otterson said we should work on editing it and Hatch agreed. He would like to look at the possible action sections and work on these. He asked Kaylor what kinds of projects the NBRC funds. She said they work on have an emphasis on infrastructure and include transportation, water systems, sewers and telecommunications. She said crosswalks are a possibility, parks, quality of life issues; helping to stop out migration, retaining families and energy projects. She suggested we go to NBRC.gov to see what projects have been funded. She said she can help with funding on projects and some require matching funds. Penny suggested checking with Ben Doyle at USDA Rural Development for possible funding for street-scaping projects. They are happy to help figure things out. Penny said our next step should be coming to consensus on 2 or 3 areas to define projects that we would like to tackle. Schwartz asked when to we engage the public. Penny feels we should have a focused engagement. Gilbert said we should focus on 6 and throw them out to the public to work it down to 3. Jared thinks people want direction and you need buy in. Penny said you want to define the projects and show you have done a lot of work. Otterson said we want to be open to other ideas. Hatch thinks we can open the discussion with this report. Jared suggested we go through the report and think about 6 or so ideas that will resonate with the town. Penny said you could identify hot projects and put them through a feasibility process. Otterson suggested we look at our white board list and compare it to the report. Hatch said that walkability and parking are examples of a good initiative to push forward; these have safety concerns. Jager said we are too hesitant to identify projects. He wants to know what will happen at Town Meeting, are we going to put something up for a project for the warrant. He said parking and access from the parking lot to the town buildings, steps, landscaping and parking lot planning; making it an attractive walk to the front doors. He thinks we should identify a project for Town Meeting. Penny said we should take a short period to shake things out; they can come back and help us plan. We should edit the document. Hatch feels it is too early to go to Town Meeting and ask for funds, this is an inspirational document. He aid that in our outreach to Mike Petrovick he has met with the BoS and is moving forward. Jared said we could add a time line to the report document to show what we have done. Jager thinks the report is worth putting out to the public, we should add the Town Hall parking to the report. Provencher said he has offered space on his property for a walkway and he will speak to Jon Gibson. He feels connectivity needs improvement. Schwartz suggested we talk to Noah Chidester about designing parking, walkway/access and landscaping around Town Hall.

Gilbert said we will meet to edit the document on Tuesday, January 15th at 6PM. Penny suggested another meeting with them and we settled on Tuesday, January 22nd at 1PM.

We will get our edits to them prior to our meeting with them on the 22nd.

Hatch said our funding from the PB budget was put in at \$1K; we had to pick a number without knowing what we were going to do with the money. Hatch asked if there are other places to get funds. Penny said that usually when they work with towns there is a fee involved. She said they backed into helping us and don't expect to be paid. We discussed printing costs for the report and Gilbert said she would check with a printer in Newport. Jared said that planning grants are available from Moose Plate grants and others. Hatch feels it is important that we show the product of our work. Jared suggested that we talk about moving forward at the end of the report. We can work on something for that.

3.0 **Next meeting** – Tuesday, January 15th at 6:00pm in Town Hall to do edits and Tuesday January 22nd at 1pm with Penny and Jared.

Meeting adjourned at 10:35am.

Respectfully submitted,
Nan Schwartz
Planning Board Secretary