

**MINUTES
OF**

**PLANNING BOARD
WORK SESSION**

PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

CITY HALL, MUNICIPAL COMPLEX, 1 JUNKINS AVENUE

7:00 P.M.

NOVEMBER 12, 2015

MEMBERS PRESENT: John Ricci, Chairman, Elizabeth Moreau, Vice Chairman; Jack Thorsen, City Council Representative, David Allen, Deputy City Manager; William Gladhill; Colby Gamester, Michael Barker; and Jay Leduc;

MEMBERS EXCUSED: Robert Marsilia, Building Inspector and Justin Finn, Alternate

ALSO PRESENT: Rick Taintor, Planning Director and Jessa Berna, Associate Planner
NBBJ Consultants: Alex Krieger, Alan Mountjoy, Chris Herlich
Nelson/Nygaard Consultant Ralph Denisco

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I. MASTER PLAN

A. PRIORITY PLAN ACTION

Chairman Ricci introduced the members of the Planning Board and the consultants from NBBJ and Nelson/Nygaard. Mr. Taintor stated that the purpose of the meeting was to get the consultant team's input on the public presentation process and the development of themes and goals for the Master Plan.

Mr. Alex Krieger of NBBJ presented a brief summary of the community's public input process. He showed the Commission the Master Plan Overview diagram, noting that he was developing drafts and hoped the process would be completed at the beginning of summer.

Mr. Krieger presented the Goals and Objectives from Portsmouth Listens and the six categories consisting of Housing, Built Environment, Neighborhood, Transportation, Arts and Culture, and Sustainability. He said that three public meetings were held, two of which dealt with the neighborhoods and one that dealt with commercial quarters, and from those meetings, he proposed four mega themes: diverse, walkable, vibrant, and authentic.

Mr. Krieger reviewed each theme beginning with the Diverse one, which was how broad a range of housing types and styles and scales might be imaginable in someone's neighborhood. He noted that the Vibrant theme addressed what might enable lower density residential neighborhoods to be connected and included multiple characters, diverse places, and unique neighborhoods. The Walkability theme denoted comfort and attractions, such as better sidewalks and more diversion along

the walks. Mr. Krieger said that a walkable neighborhood should mean that it was also bikable and drivable and warranted which streets needed change in a neighborhood. The theme of Authenticity meant old or new things that acquired distinction and value over time. Mr. Krieger also noted that there were amenities exercises in each of the meetings.

Mr. Alan Mountjoy stated that the purpose of the themes was to help them go beyond what Portsmouth Listens had generated and get into more specifics. It was meant to engage neighborhoods and help them to understand what aspects of their neighborhoods were important. Mr. Mountjoy said that all exercises were meant to be location-based. During the Amenities exercises, he said he asked people what they thought were valuable amenities. The existing amenities were things like parks, schools, shopping, restaurants, grocery stores, libraries, and forestry. The most desired amenities were things like bike parks, sidewalks, coffee shops, roads, and better sidewalks, which was the main issue.

The Authenticity exercise consisted of the scale, design and quality of place that made Portsmouth authentic, and it helped the consultants understand what citizens liked or disliked about their neighborhoods. Mr. Mountjoy said he met with people from every neighborhood, who said they liked parks, green places, walkability, and the urban access of Downtown the most. What they least liked was Woodbury Avenue, saying that it had dangerous intersections and a problematic infrastructure.

The Walkability exercise related to the quality of streets, sidewalks, and pathways making a big difference in quality of life. People were asked to draw maps and circles to denote key places where they felt uncomfortable or unsafe, and the result was they felt that local streets were okay but that major corridors were unsafe to walk.

Mr. Mountjoy stated that one meeting was based on corridor development, and he asked the citizens to design a street section using Lego blocks to build development scenarios within corridors around the City. He also asked them to rank existing corridors on a scale of 1 to 5, 5 being the best scenario. People ranked Lafayette Road as a 2 on the scale. He said he then did a visual preference survey, which was a series of simulations taking an existing corridor with lots of traffic lanes. The result was that people liked it better if it had a bike lane or development along the road. When trees were added to it, everyone loved it. There were positive responses when separate parking areas were added.

The last exercise was the Lego one, where people were asked to look at pieces of the City within the corridors and use different-colored bricks for residential and commercial components. He said that people suggested moving the retail on Woodbury Avenue to the street and making Gosling Meadows a mix of housing and retailing. They also suggested that the houses on Lafayette Road be moved toward the back, with mixed uses in the front. Generally, people did not like lots of space in the corridors.

Mr. Mountjoy told the Committee that they reworked the themes and added a Resilient theme. Mr. Krieger asked for reactions to all the themes.

Mr. Barker asked what the sixth theme would be. Mr. Mountjoy said he wasn't sure because the existing five themes covered a lot of territory and had subcomponents. Mr. Krieger said they wanted to make them subjective enough to cover a lot of territory but not so specific that things were lost, and he cited housing as an example, saying that diversity encompassed housing.

Chairman Ricci asked Mr. Mountjoy to review the five themes, saying it might encourage more themes. Mr. Mountjoy said that the Diversity theme would capture not only housing, which was a major issue, but also business uses that offered job opportunities. The result would be a city that welcomed residents of all ages and incomes levels and supported a mix of small-to-large businesses. The goal was to more effectively use existing housing stock to accommodate the needs of current and future residents. Mr. Mountjoy said they had to match the demographics of who would live there and that the stock might need to adapt itself to match demographics.

Mr. Mountjoy said he had also heard that increasing the amount of housing at sizes and prices that were affordable to moderate income people was important. Mr. Thorsen asked whether Mr. Mountjoy would review the feedback about the connection between size and price and the economics of what it meant to get to that price. Mr. Mountjoy replied that the existing housing study identified the gap in terms of where the market was not being met, and he wasn't sure if there were details on the size of housing because it was focused more on prices. Mr. Thorsen asked whether they had achieved the goals in terms of feasibility. Mr. Barker noted that the goal was to see if the Commission agreed that more affordable housing was needed, and if so, then whether or not the City Council would support those goals. Mr. Mountjoy said there would be more detail pertaining to what could be done for land use and balancing the need for housing with the need for industrial space. They would establish metrics, and if the Commission wanted to set targets, it would be a good tool for progress. The topic was further discussed, and Mr. Barker asked whether projections for 2015 and 2020 could be shown graphically. Mr. Mountjoy agreed. Mr. Barker asked how many residents Mr. Mountjoy spoke to, and he said 90 residents, plus members from Portsmouth Listens, making up a small but selective sample of citizens. They discussed building heights and whether people wanted high buildings. Mr. Mountjoy noted that people thought new housing should go in the corridors but not in their neighborhoods.

Mr. Mountjoy then brought up Goal #3, encouraging public and private partnerships to create mixed use and income development, and Goal #4, ensuring the appropriate supply of industrial and commercial space for a diverse economy. Mr. Thorsen asked what Mr. Mountjoy considered more industrial, other than Pease. Mr. Krieger replied that they meant ensuring an appropriate supply, not increasing. Mr. Mountjoy said they would not eliminate the job potential of Portsmouth in the interest of short term. Mr. Barker asked why Goal #2 was increasing the supply and Goal #4 was ensuring the supply, noting that there was a bigger shortage of commercial buildings than affordable housing. Mr. Krieger said it was why they needed to listen to the Commission. Mr. Mountjoy suggested that ensuring the right kind of industrial space might be useful in the study. He said that start-up space had not been studied but might have to be to find out if the City fell short. Vice-Chair Moreau said that the Commission had not asked the business population for feedback and thought it might be an area that they needed more information about.

Mr. Taintor summarized the discussion, saying that no arguments had been heard about the Diversity theme and there were no comments about the third theme, but there were questions about the others.

Mr. Mountjoy stated that the second most common discussion was connectivity and that he had heard several comments about walkability and pedestrian/bicycle lane improvements. He elaborated on what it meant for a city to be connected with a transportation network supporting all forms of mobility and encouraging walking, cycling and transit use. He noted, however, that Portsmouth was still auto-dependent even though there was a lot less driving in the downtown area.

Mr. Mountjoy stated that the goals under the Connectivity theme were the following:

- 1) Improve bike and pedestrian linkages between neighborhoods and services.
- 2) Promote land use patterns to provide alternatives to single-occupancy vehicle use. (It was suggested that different land use patterns might be more effective in encouraging people to get to where they needed to go. People also noted that they made elective trips in a car that they otherwise wouldn't if they had walkable amenities. They felt that proximity to services and housing would make a big difference).
- 3) Ensure year-round use of a pedestrian and cycling network. (A lot of people noted that it was almost impossible to walk the previous winter due to the snow banks and unplowed sidewalks).
- 4) Enhance major corridors to accommodate multimodal access and a mix of uses.
- 5) Continue improving connections to regional transportation networks.

Mr. Thorsen remarked that Maplewood Avenue was defined as being bad for walkability or safety, yet the development in that area would shunt more pedestrians to Maplewood Avenue. He asked Mr. Mountjoy if that would be included in the goals, and Mr. Mountjoy agreed. Chairman Ricci said he felt that, as far as connectivity, public transportation seemed to not quite work because downtown parking was extremely hard to find and no one took public transportation downtown. He said he wanted to see a focus on truly making public transportation work in the next five years.

Mr. Mountjoy said that Goal #2 would ensure that land use patterns would support the potential for transit-rich corridors to encourage ridership and justify the improved services. Mr. Denisco stated that the service was not robust enough to get the change people were seeking and that his organization would make specific recommendations about the corridors that could support more frequent transit changes. He said there were two components, one that fit in with transit within Portsmouth and the other that related to the larger connections to Portsmouth from the rest of the region.

Mr. Taintor summarized as follows: there was no controversy about the theme of having a transportation network that supported all forms of mobility and encouraged walking and so on. Goal #1 was complete linkages and Goal #2 was land use patterns and supporting public transportation. He noted that one point missing was downtown walkability and how it fit into the structure, and he wasn't sure that the goals addressed it. He suggested adding another goal to make public transport work. He also said he had concerns about mobility in the North End.

Mr. Mountjoy then discussed the third theme, Vibrant, saying it related to a city that supported inviting neighborhoods and multiple active centers. People were responding to an active downtown and wanted the neighborhoods to have some of that vitality. The main question was what other places could be more vibrant. Mr. Mountjoy outlined the following goals:

- 1) Increase access to active and passive recreation uses for residents of all ages, i.e. access to parks or a group recreational facility for league play.
- 2) Ensure widespread opportunities to enjoy and create art and culture, which could touch on affordability of work space and also preserving space for culture and art.
- 3) Encourage mixed use centers in areas outside Downtown.
- 4) Transform the corridors into pedestrian-friendly areas.

Vice-Chair Moreau stated that the challenge was that no one wanted it in their backyard, so there were just pockets of it, and she asked how they would address how close the increase in density was along the corridor. Mr. Mountjoy noted that many of the corridors they looked at backed up on industrial areas like Lafayette Rd and that there were also a lot of wetlands that formed buffers between uses.

Mr. Thorsen stated that the third topic was an important one because it led to the pockets development, and he asked whether there could be guidelines for what it would take to identify other pockets. He also noted that pockets that were imbedded along residential residents fed other pockets, and he wanted to see a definition of what it took to create a pocket and what areas might have that potential. Mr. Mountjoy remarked that the Lego exercises focused on some of those spots. Chairman Ricci stated that the City struggled with multi-use athletic fields and he wanted the Master Plan to specifically incorporate and continue to work with those multi-use fields and focus on either vibrancy or resiliency. He noted that older people also liked to play sports. Mr. Mountjoy said it might fit under Goal #1.

Mr. Taintor summarized by saying that there was no argument with the theme statement and the comments were more about the details. Goal #1 needed more detail about multi-use fields, and Goals #3 and #4 needed ways to classify or identify potential pocket sites for development centers and ensure increase development to mitigate the neighborhoods.

Mr. Mountjoy next discussed the Authentic theme of how a City treasured its historic neighborhoods while embracing change. He noted that not everything in Portsmouth was historic, and some areas that didn't have a lot of historic value needed to change, but they wanted to leave room for places like the 3S Artspace. He also commented on how some people like to fake history and others didn't, and they needed to figure out how to regulate those kinds of things. He outlined the following goals:

- 1) Encourage preservation of the City's historic resources through advocacy and outreach.
- 2) Protect and enhance the City's working waterfront and maximize public access.
- 3) Maximize and enhance view corridors, parks, open spaces, and historic resources.
- 4) Preserve and protect the integrity and visibility of prominent historic landmarks.
- 5) Ensure that the scale, massing, and design of new buildings was respectful of, and appropriate to, the surrounding neighborhood context and identify whether or not some of the commercial districts had to be historical.

Mr. Mountjoy recommended that they do a visual survey of views and protecting historic resources and noted that it was not within the scope of the work plan.

Mr. Taintor stated that they had discussed the design standards along the corridors, and he thought perhaps there was a goal that related to authenticity of the corridors because many of the 1950 and 1960 corridors were authentic but not historic. Chairman Ricci added that Portsmouth had various neighborhoods and asked whether it made sense to look at 3-4 neighborhoods and try to give goals to those. Mr. Krieger thought that saying such things should be responsive to context rather than City-wide. Chairman Ricci said it could be highlighted. Mr. Thorsen asked whether they needed to go through the exercise of defining the borders of the Historic District and whether it should include other historic buildings and not be concentrated on the Downtown area. Mr. Gladhill brought up the fact that future residents might appreciate the 1950s, '60s and '70s development. Mr. Mountjoy replied

that there was no risk of them mandating change in existing residential neighborhoods – that they meant places that were not residential, like old gas stations, not historically-significant buildings.

Mr. Taintor summarized the goal by saying they were looking at different neighborhood types and whether or not to preserve more contemporary architecture. He said he was still at a loss by what the consultants meant by embracing change as a goal and felt that it was still a challenge.

Mr. Mountjoy then discussed the Resilient (Sustainable) theme, which related to a city that took a long view toward the environmental and responded and adapted to a changing climate. He outlined the following goals:

- 1) Achieve excellence in sustainable public and private infrastructure.
- 2) Prioritize stewardship of public open spaces to maximize public enjoyment and environmental preservation.
- 3) Maximize the reduction, recycling, and reuse of waste and the responsible use of materials.
- 4) Continue to incorporate climate change impacts, including sea level rise, into all planning efforts.

Mr. Thorsen noted that Portsmouth often followed a Lead Certified Standard but wasn't sure whether they had a standard for new development, and he asked whether it should be considered. Mr. Mountjoy replied that many cities were pushing it and that Lead Certified was pretty much just a standard. Mr. Thorsen suggested asking the developers what kind of hurdles they would find if the City were to consider infrastructure requirements of sustainability. They further discussed it.

Mr. Mountjoy stated that the toughest topic was parking because a lot of cities mandated maximum parking, but developers tended to build what they thought they needed. It also affected housing costs, and the parking limited the density. Mr. Gladhill noted that environmental and development seemed to be a balancing act as the population grew and was becoming scarce. He asked how one balanced the needs of the environment with someone's property if there were endangered species on the property. Mr. Mountjoy asked Mr. Gladhill if he was suggesting that they provide more stringent requirements in Portsmouth, in addition to the wetlands protection ones. They further discussed it.

Chairman Ricci asked whether there were any recaps. Mr. Mountjoy noted that Goal #1, which was to more effectively use existing housing stock to accommodate the needs of current and future residents, would have multiple priorities and a variety of matrices. Mr. Krieger said that would be their goal for the follow-up meeting.

Chairman Ricci stated that one concern was that the Master Plan was not driven by 90-100 people, and he knew there was a demand for 120,000 s.f. buildings. He said that he wanted the New Hampshire Quarterly Forecast to be researched to ensure that the Master Plan was not guided simply to residential. He also thought that Portsmouth had a huge need for assisted living retirement housing. Mr. Gladhill said he liked the five categories and having a few subcategories for each one. He noted that the Master Plan was a large document and could become cumbersome, and he suggested that the Planning Board focus on the issues that were most important to them and to the City.

Mr. Mountjoy said that his team would review all the items and role some issues into the next plan and eliminate others.

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II. ADJOURNMENT

A motion to adjourn at 8:55 p.m. was made and seconded and passed unanimously.

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Respectfully Submitted,

Joann Breault
Acting Secretary for the Planning Board

These minutes were approved at the December 17, 2015 Planning Board meeting.