

MINUTES

**PLANNING BOARD
PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE**

CITY HALL, MUNICIPAL COMPLEX, 1 JUNKINS AVENUE

7:00 P.M.

AUGUST 27, 2015

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

MEMBERS EXCUSED: Robert Marsilia, Building Inspector; Colby Gamester, Jay Leduc, Justin Finn

ALSO PRESENT: Rick Taintor, Planning Director

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I. MASTER PLAN WORK SESSION

Chairman Ricci welcomed everyone and stated that there were 3 things that would be reviewed this evening; the Existing Conditions Report, the Urban Design Concepts and the Community Participation Strategy. Each member of the Planning Board introduced themselves.

A. Existing Conditions Report – Q & A

Mr. Taintor introduced the NBBJ team. Alex Krieger, Principal with NBBJ was present. Kelly Lynema with NBBJ, Alice Carey, NBBJ Consultant and Lisa Cohen of Nelson/Nygaard were also present. Mr. Krieger presented the Existing Conditions. Ms. Lynema stated that everyone should have a copy of the draft of the Existing Conditions Report. She spoke to some of the demographic shifts that have occurred in Portsmouth in the past 10 years. The population shift (an increase) was not quite as dramatic as predicted in the 2005 Master Plan. There was a significant loss of residents in the 25-44 year old age group. She stated that this may have been due to housing costs in Portsmouth or it may have been due several other reasons such as the balance of rentals vs. purchases, challenges to young families, or the expense of living in Portsmouth. From a zoning and land use perspective, the Gateway District and the Gateway Planned Development have some zoning challenges that Mr. Krieger will speak about. Portsmouth has a very diverse economic base and there are 2.4 jobs for every resident. That is a blessing as well as a challenge because a lot of people are coming in from the outside to fill those jobs. Housing costs have dramatically outpaced household income in Portsmouth. Ms. Lynema then opened the floor to questions.

Mr. Gladhill inquired about the age group decline in the 25-44 year old category and pointed out that there has also been a decline in the age group of 18 years and under. In addition, there has been an increase in the group of 55-64 years of age. He wondered whether the decline in certain age groups was due to the fact that as people get married and have children, they are looking for a home with

some land and Portsmouth cannot accommodate this type of housing. Where it does exist in the area, it is much less expensive in other towns.

Ms. Lynema stated that this shift has been seen on a national basis, although factors involved vary for different areas. She stated that the numbers come from national census data so exactly why the shifts have happened is an unknown.

Mr. Gladhill stated that if Portsmouth isn't able to retain the 30-45 year old age group due to the lack of land with home, the Board may want to focus efforts in other areas because the land base is not in Portsmouth and not much can be done about that.

Mr. Krieger stated that home ownership in this country has dropped significantly in the past decade; 69% of Americans owned a home in 2005-2006. That is down to 63%. Theories are that the recession had a hand in this and this may account for a percent or two in the downshift but the downshift has been occurring for the past decade. When someone is in their 20's, they may seek out a place like Portsmouth, Portland, or Boston. When someone is in the 30-45 age range, they are looking for a home, not necessarily a yard, but they are looking for someplace more affordable. They may find something more affordable in a town other than Portsmouth. They are not at their peak earning capacity at 30-45 years of age. Older people seek out Portsmouth because they are at their peak earning potential so they can afford to live in Portsmouth. This older age group has increased in percentage in Portsmouth. The reasoning may very well have to do in part, or entirely, with affordability.

Councilor Thorsen followed up on the comments of Mr. Krieger. Given the current housing stock in Portsmouth, it is becoming more expensive. He inquired as to whether the City should be looking at allowing denser developments/housing in order to change the inventory to meet the concerns over expensive housing. Councilor Thorsen inquired if this would be the recommendation of Mr. Krieger.

Mr. Krieger stated that the question is a loaded one. However, the generic answer is to have more housing (whatever kind) and housing costs will stop rising (exponentially as they are now) due to supply and demand. Planners say that the more diverse the housing is in a town, the more diverse the patronage that will be seen. He stated that he felt that Portsmouth does have to become denser. How much and where, is uncertain at this point.

Ms. Moreau stated that the Mr. Krieger reported that resident parking had been established in the City. She inquired as to where that might be.

Mr. Krieger stated that resident parking in the City (already established) was wishful thinking on the part of the consultants.

Ms. Moreau inquired about the meaning of tree inventory cover.

Ms. Lynema stated that what was meant by tree inventory cover was simply more tree cover, which leads to better mitigation of stormwater events, providing better shade, etc.

Mr. Taintor stated that it is a way of defining tree cover with a certain percentage as a goal. Philadelphia for example, has current tree coverage of 45%. Their goal is 65% coverage. It is a way of using a metric to accomplish a goal and in doing so, they can say that they will have a certain effect on the heat island.

Mr. Krieger stated that trees do 5 things; make people happy, provide shade, absorb water, eat carbon and cool temperatures through shade.

Ms. Moreau inquired about Maplewood for Gateway treatment. She inquired as to what section the consultants meant for Gateway treatment.

Mr. Krieger stated that they put a lot of thought into Gateway Zoning and wondered whether the Gateway zoning that has been incorporated will bring about the changes intended by the last Master Plan, which was more housing, more affordability, greater density. The presentation this evening will pose these questions.

Mr. Gladhill stated that with regard to median income, he was surprised that Portsmouth was lower than the 4 abutting towns of the City. He inquired as to whether this was due to a higher stock of rental housing (which tends to be lower income). In Rye, Newcastle, etc. there is virtually no rental housing. Newington was included in the Dover area, not Portsmouth and that also surprised him. Given the economics, it seems that Newington would be part of Portsmouth. Some people have difficulty even telling where Newington ends and Portsmouth begins.

Mr. Krieger stated that they can use the counsel of the Planning Board on this issue.

Ms. Lynema stated that the information was pulled from U.S. Census data. If you look at 1999 and 2009, there is a shift in all of these towns so there is a bit of push and pull going on. In any planning study where the boundary is drawn depends on the database used.

Mr. Gladhill stated that with a median of \$64,000/year salary in Portsmouth compared to \$103,000/year salary in Newcastle, those moving into Newcastle would be able to afford more of a house.

Mr. Krieger stated that the number is a median and that in itself can be deceiving. What he sees as the important take away is whether or not Portsmouth has a broader gap between low income and very high income. This would bring down the median. Portsmouth may have more in the category of very high income and low income whereas someplace like Newcastle may have more inbetween those extremes so the median looks better. Those specifics have yet to be answered.

Mr. Taintor stated that the delineations of the towns are not ones made by Portsmouth or the Planning Board. They are made by the Census Bureau. It may have to do with convenience or commuting patterns. He stated that what the map doesn't show is that the Portsmouth area does include places like Kittery. The information that is published is aggregate information so it is not possible to extract Newington information and add it to Portsmouth.

Councilor Thorsen stated that there is a high concentration of visitors in Portsmouth and the report confirms this. At what point does this activity become so prevalent that a town will lose its other characteristics and just become a beach town. He wondered where that threshold is.

Mr. Krieger stated that the question that Councilor Thorsen poses is a fascinating one. There are assertions about where that threshold is, but he is uncertain of how to answer the question right now.

Mr. Taintor stated that the housing and economic development piece has been completed by prior consultants so the current consultants may not have spent as much time to date on this piece. In many cases, the tourist businesses support the town. In the off season, the residents have great businesses and restaurants to frequent that they may not otherwise have without tourism, so it is a trade-off.

Chairman Ricci stated that there is such a huge job base between Pease and the downtown, the City goes back to “normal” the other 9 months of the year when there are not so many tourists.

Ms. Lynema stated that if Portsmouth is compared to other towns that are primarily tourist driven, the year round diversity of jobs, as well as the number of jobs that Portsmouth has, wouldn't be seen.

Mr. Krieger stated that statistics for jobs depict that Portsmouth is far from the economy depending mostly on tourism. If the tourists were to stop coming, it would not devastate the economy in Portsmouth like it might for a city such as Orlando, Florida.

Deputy City Manager Allen stated that the jobs chart on page 81 of the report was very encouraging.

B. Urban Design Concepts – Presentation and Discussion

Mr. Krieger stated that much of the concepts in the Urban Design Concepts deal with affordability of Portsmouth. They will focus on a couple areas around a couple of corridors (that are gateways, or gateway like areas). They've identified 3 zones: Study Zone A, which is Gateway North, Study Zone B, which is the Route 1 Bypass Corridor, Study Zone C, which is Gateway South A and Study Zone D which is Gateway South B. Mr. Krieger displayed maps depicting zoning, wetlands and conservation, and land use patterns. He stated that there may be opportunities around the edges of some of the conservation areas for the expansion of neighborhoods, unless the boundaries are absolutely rigid. Creating the Bypass has created frayed edges along both sides of it. This area may offer potential but may need a bit more attention focused on it. Neighborhoods seem trapped between I-95 and the Bypass. He encouraged the Planning Board to drive up and down this area slowly and think about traffic and where there may be opportunities to change this area to be more attractive for one to live in. He stated that the Gateway District objectives include: encouraging mixed-use development (residential and commercial), enhancing the character of corridor development, expansion of moderate-cost housing opportunities, incorporation of pedestrian/bicycle access and circulation, and the efficient use of transportation infrastructure. Using slides, he showed how to visualize possibilities for the Route 1 Bypass corridor using trees/landscaping, sidewalks, etc. He showed examples from other cities across the country such as Glenview, IL.

Mr. Taintor stated that one of the slides depicts no further development, but rather public investment and how that can transform an area. Another slide depicts that if the right kind of zoning were put in place, what possibilities exist for transformation of the area.

Mr. Gladhill stated that the Bypass has some adult oriented businesses and a gun exchange. They are well established businesses. He inquired as to how a business could be encouraged to move into that area. They may not want to move in next to this type of business.

Mr. Krieger stated that he does not know the answer to Mr. Gladhill's question. Those types of businesses tend to go where it is cheaper. However, zoning can be used as a mechanism for change. This area could be "up-zoned". In which case, the businesses may be "forced" out. This may be the answer over the long-term. It may be time to begin to address this.

Mr. Gladhill stated that the Bypass has become trucker friendly and this was at least in part to avoid trucking activity in downtown.

Mr. Krieger stated that parking always seems to be an issue and the number of parking spaces in the City may have to shift. The economic development committee may not be in favor of such a thing. For example, there would not be 1.5 spaces in the Gateway Zoning for residential parking/unit and 1.3 spaces in the Gateway Planned Development. It would be hard to meet a mixed used objective and still accommodate all the desired parking. But we may not be as far away as one might think of a time when people do not demand the 2 parking spaces they feel they need. Mr. Krieger pointed out areas where the existing zoning makes it hard to achieve what the City is looking to achieve with new zoning. Using slides, he showed the Lafayette Strip at Route 1 Bypass South (Fresh Market/Bowl-a-Rama Plaza). He showed Option One, which was gateway conforming (conforms to each requirement of the code). It yields 90 housing units and hides parking behind the development. There may not be a huge market for this as there are housing units facing Route 1 Lafayette Road. This may be a tough sell. If this were flipped and more of the housing were perpendicular to Route 1 and the parking were to be next to Route 1 Bypass, there may be more of a market demand. But for a developer to take this risk may be asking too much. Option Two is Gateway Planned Development and would be 70% residential (non-conforming). With this option, there would be 153 units of housing, but there would be less surface area dedicated to parking. This may, or may not be, advisable. There is less housing facing Route 1. Option Three would be 88% residential (non-conforming). Microunits and lofts are part of the housing in this option. Housing is larger in height and there is a retail component (which faces a green). More of the development faces away from the road. There are 115 units of housing with a bit more open space and less parking. Option Four is non-conforming; some of the parking is in a garage. There is substantially more housing. This may drive down the cost of housing. There is almost no parking on the ground. Housing is facing other housing and also facing more pastoral like conditions. In Option Five, the height limit is eliminated. There may be 107 units, more apartment or condo like in nature. The center of the development is reserved for a more graceful retail center. There is not as much parking onsite. One of the conclusions is that unless some of the restrictions are eased, these options may not be options at all. There is a choice of height, parking, density, building type. Parcel size is also a limitation. The sites being looked at in Portsmouth are approximately 6 acres, but they are adjacent to 30 acre parcels. Using slides, Mr. Krieger showed 5 areas where the options presented exist: 1) Crocker Park in Westlake, OH, 2) Easton Towne Center, (outside of) Columbus, OH, 3) "The Glen", Glenview Illinois (former Naval Air Station Base), 4) South Side Works,

Pittsburgh, PA, 5) Nouvelle at Natick Collection. These examples have in common (as elements of successful developments): a certain leap of faith made by the developer, a certain market and slightly larger areas than what Portsmouth has in the gateway areas. It caters to a growing trend where people want to live in a neighborhood, yet have a level of walkability, shops and places to dine near where they live. The parcels where these options exist are all 20-40 acres in size. Portsmouth may not have the scale to create these areas. However, the mall areas in Newington have sufficient scale to accomplish the options discussed.

Mr. Taintor stated that there will be a proposal for the Southgate Plaza forthcoming that will incorporate 100-120 units of housing. It would add housing to an existing plaza. When the Gateway was examined, it was the hope that Yokens would be developed in the manner just discussed. Unfortunately, developers weren't ready for that kind of development. Instead they saw strip development potential and now we have a strip drug store and a strip hamburger place, etc. The City has not sprawled enough to be able to redevelop areas large enough to accomplish the examples discussed. The two Market Basket plazas, Southgate Plaza, Durgin Square may be big enough, but there are many more 6 acre areas that exist in Portsmouth and what can be done with these 6 acre areas may be the challenge.

Mr. Krieger spoke of other areas for housing opportunities including Middle Road/Route 33, Route 1 South/Southgate Plaza, the area near the Urban Forestry Center (this may be the most problematic area), Gosling Meadows/Woodbury Gateway, Market Basket at Woodbury Avenue, Maplewood Avenue/Route 1 Bypass, Route 1 Bypass/Traffic Circle, and City Hall. The land parcel that City Hall sits on could be a possibility for additional housing density with some readjustment of the parking. As site planners, the consultants would love to spend some time with the Planning Board on the City Hall area. He also stated that there is a lot of green space in Portsmouth.

Mr. Barker inquired as to whether Mr. Krieger is proposing specific zoning for these particular spots.

Mr. Krieger stated that they are looking at areas that are zoned in a certain way, but they are not necessarily used/developed in that manner. For example, the area may be labeled residential, but not entirely used for this. He is suggesting that in addition to thinking about the Gateway District, the Planning Board may also consider these smaller spaces as a new possibility. Perhaps 10 units of housing can be considered, not just 100 units of housing.

Mr. Taintor stated that some of the "green" areas are not just conservation areas, they are really wet. These areas may not be feasible to do anything with except perhaps filling them, which is not necessarily the answer.

C. Community Participation Strategy –

Ms. Berna stated that some tentative meeting dates (3) have been scheduled and the locations are spread throughout the City. The attempt was to try to make the meetings accessible.

- 1) Tuesday, September 22, 2015 at the Urban Forestry Center
- 2) Monday, September 28, 2015 at the Portsmouth Middle School
- 3) Wednesday, Oct 7, 2015 at the New Franklin Elementary School

Mr. Taintor stated that the intention is to use a mix of City wide visioning that builds on what Mr. Krieger and his team have presented this evening, and also to broaden the scope beyond the corridor type housing focus. The intention is also to provide an opportunity for residents to talk about issues in their neighborhood. If a resident lives near the Urban Forestry Center, they could go to the meeting at the Urban Forestry Center and discuss local issues, and so on. He stated that there have been discussions with Portsmouth Listens to hold another round of sessions in late October/early November looking at the West End, and building on the Charrette. They are also considering waiting until after the New Year until some recommendations have been made. There is a Master Plan Work Session scheduled for September 24, 2015. He is recommending that rather than using that time as a regular meeting time, using it to discuss affordable housing in Portsmouth. Several members of the Planning Board are meeting with staff of the New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority and the Workforce Housing Coalition to find out what kind of presentation they could do.

Chairman Ricci thanked NBBJ and the Planning Board for participating in the meeting this evening.

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II. ADJOURNMENT.

A motion to adjourn at 8:45pm was made and seconded and passed unanimously.

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Respectfully Submitted,

Toni McLellan
Acting Secretary for the Planning Board

These minutes were approved at the September 17, 2015 Planning Board Meeting.