

Town of Chelmsford
 Master Plan Update Committee
 50 Billerica Rd., Room 200 Chelmsford, Ma 01824
 Regular Meeting
MINUTES
 March 12, 2020
 Approved August 13, 2020

Attending: George Zaharoolis, Bill Murphy, Kenneth Lefebvre, Nancy Araway

Not Present: Donald Van Dyne, Scott Rummel, Joseph Ready

Others Present: Evan Belansky-Community Development Director, Debra Taverna-Historic Commission

Please note that all documents referenced in these minutes are on file at the Town Manager’s Office, 50 Billerica Rd., Chelmsford, Mass. This meeting was hand recorded by the Recording Secretary.

This meeting was called to order at 7:05PM by Chairman Zaharoolis.

Public Input

No one came forward at this time.

State Planning Assistance Grant

Route 3 interchange

Draft RFP

Discussion tabled.

Historic Preservation – discussion with Historical Commission

Mr. Belansky worked offline with the Historic Commission to update the Historic Section of the plan. Deb Taverna noted the biggest concern is the preservation of older homes. There are 9 homes from the 1600’s, and less than 100 from the 1700’s. She suggested instituting an 18 month demolition delay for pre-1800 homes, as currently, developers are simply waiting them out. The process done for a demolition request was described. Two homes in five years have qualified for a delay. They’ve approved 12 demolitions. Mr. Belansky suggested reaching out to Town Counsel to see if this delay of 18 months for homes from the 1800’s and before is legal. Developers are finding that most of the homes are less costly to demolish rather than renovate. The Commission feels that removing these homes changes the whole look of a neighborhood. Concerns with renovations are triggering updated building codes, which also adds to the cost of the renovation.

It currently costs the Commission \$600 to inventory a historic home.

There is legislation that allows Historic Commissions to be categorized as a certified local government. There was a recommendation in the 2010 plan to move toward this. Mrs. Taverna indicated that the Historic Commission is ready to move forward on this plan, which would allow the Commission to apply for more grants. Reconnaissance surveys are being looked into, which would allow them to see old foundations, Native American sites, etc. from the air. They are still researching this technology.

The Commission offers tours of the Forefathers Cemetery, the Middlesex Toll House and the 1812 School House to 5th and 6th graders, and the public as volunteers are available. They have sponsored talks and seminars to learn as much as they can, and share this with others.

The Commission has completed 119 home inventories to date, and they are planning on doing 20 more in the next year.

Residents in North Chelmsford are still not too interested in forming a Historic District. Business owners feel it impedes too much on what they can do with their buildings.

The Commission is very concerned about the mills in North Chelmsford, and they want to document those buildings before they go away.

They are working on their website. Fred Merriam has been very efficient with updating the site.

Mr. Belansky requested the Commission's updates be sent to him.

Recommendations from the 2010 plan were listed and read into the record. Ms. Araway asked if the Historic and Cultural Preservation plan needs to be updated. A lot of work is still needed or is ongoing with many of the recommendations. The façade program is still being worked on.

The Town Clerk is working on preserving vital records.

Creating a Historic District for South Chelmsford would be difficult as the homes are spread out.

Scenic roads are reviewed by the Commission; the Planning Board should also be monitoring these roads.

Historically appropriate design guidelines may need to be identified more clearly. The design guidelines are different for the various parts of town. Ms. Araway noted there is not much interest in historic preservation in the Town in general. Mr. Belansky suggested that neighborhood historic districts may be easier to establish; these are also known as Community Conservation Districts. Mr. Murphy cited difficulties with some districts being very strict on what a building owner is allowed to do with their own building.

Ms. Araway suggested that the Center Village District may need to be broadened to include nearby historic buildings.

Mrs. Taverna will submit a marked up version of the Historic Preservation section updates. Many things are ongoing.

State planning grant

Mr. Belansky announced that the Town received a grant award for \$60,000.00 to complete a data study three interchanges along Rt. 3. An RFP is almost ready to be issued. Multiple committees and boards were asked to comment. Committee members were encouraged to submit their comments to Mr. Belansky. The analysis could be referenced in the Master Plan Update. The study will help the Town be prepared to respond to market changes in plaza areas and highway exchanges, in anticipation of changes in the retail market over the next 10 years. Mr. Zaharoolis cited examples of failed malls that are being converted to residences or entertainment centers. Ms. Araway expects to see changes in office and industrial spaces, especially in light of the Corona Virus scare. There will be dramatic business changes coming out of this.

Discuss / Review Housing

The 2017 Housing Production Plan was provided to the Committee, which covers Affordable and Market housing needs and Zoning strategies. The Housing Advisory Board has been monitoring this plan. Ms. Araway felt that the Planning Board needs to work on monitoring this further. Developers with “friendly 40B’s” such as LIP programs are one strategy to use while the Town is in Safe Harbor under Chapter 40B development requirements. Mr. Belansky noted that each area of Town may need its own strategy to create appropriate housing. Chelmsford has created a variety of housing stock. Many of the multi-family developments are in beautiful condition. People demand bigger spaces. UMass West campus has a plan that offers a variety of housing styles. The 2010 Master Plan discussed that housing stock was needed before commercial development would happen, and that’s what has been happening. More people living here, now you see more restaurants and other types of small businesses.

Young people buying homes are now in their 30’s. Households are getting smaller, as couples are not having as many children. Many people are choosing to live alone. Demographics are changing.

Traffic concerns are making people work closer to home, encouraging Live-Work-Play concepts. Commuting time is detracting people from moving here if they work in Boston. Mr. Belansky maintained that development is necessary in order to be a vibrant community.

Survey and Public Input session – updates

The session scheduled for March 19, 2020 has been cancelled due to Corona Virus concerns, per the recommendation of the Board of Health. Mr. Belansky will notify the public of the cancellation; this Public Input Session will be done at a later time. The Master Plan Survey has received over 1000 responses at this time.

The next meeting is currently planned for March 26, 2020.

Agenda items for next meeting

Survey results and a discussion of the Housing Section with NMCOG will continue.

Approval of minutes

There were no Minutes to approve this evening.

Adjourn

Motion: by Ms. Araway to adjourn the meeting at 8:35PM. Seconded by Mr. Lefebvre. **Motion carries, unanimous.**

Respectfully Submitted,
Vivian W. Merrill,
Recording Secretary

Supporting Documents:

- Draft Update of Land Use, Zoning, and Economic Development Section
- 2017 Housing Production Plan
- Draft Update of the Housing Section