

**TOWN OF HARVARD
PLANNING BOARD
STRATEGIC PLANNING SESSION MINUTES
AUGUST 7, 2021
APPROVED: SEPTEMBER 13, 2021**

Chair Justin Brown called the meeting to order at 12:05pm on the porch of the Hildreth House at 15 Elm Street, Harvard.

Members Present: Justin Brown, Stacia Donahue, Richard Cabelus, Brian Cook and Doug Thornton (via Zoom) and Jefferson Buron (Associate Member)

Others Present: Christopher Ryan (Director of Community & Economic Development) and Liz Allard (Land Use Administrator)

Review Policy & Procedure

- Planning Board Handbook – Provided to all new Board members
- Attending Citizen Planner Training Collaborative Training Sessions – Funding available to pay for attendance by Board members
- 1-on-1 Training with new members/Role of the Staff – New members can be in touch with Ryan for training
- Continuation of Board Training – Ryan will continue to provide training at regular meetings as time allows
- Social Media – Harvard NextDoor is not the platform to engage in discussion and/or debate; only use it to direct residents to the Town website

Master Plan

- Review Progress of Implementation under the Planning Board purview
 - Form a Master Plan Implementation & Evaluation Committee. Update the Master Plan in ten years - Still seeking Planning Board formal endorsement before submitting to Select Board.
 - Re-codify the Zoning Bylaw – Recodification is only one of several updates needed for Bylaw; barriers are funding and availability of staff to complete.
 - Provide for mixed-use buildings as of right in the C District, e.g., retail on the first floor and housing above - Part of Ayer Road Development Plan but could also as interim modify C zoning or merge ARV-SP with C.
 - Replace or modify the existing OSC-PRD bylaw with the state's new Natural Resource Protection model to remove barriers that restrict its utility - Draft completed with help of MRPC. Seeking funding for financial analysis. MRPC draft revised by staff and consultant and ready to begin public outreach for Spring 2022 STM.
 - Amend the Zoning Bylaw to allow housing alternatives for seniors. (In 2016, Town Meeting approved an amendment to allow assisted living facilities as part of an ARV-SP.) - Draft for Senior Housing Development bylaw has been passed along with changes to Accessory Apartments.
 - Create a vision for the C District that encourages village or Main Street style development and establish Design Guidelines to achieve it - A three-phase planning process for the corridor including a market analysis, fiscal impact analysis, vision plan, and zoning tools. Plan formally endorsed by Planning Board and Select Board. Seeking funding for all phases as of June 2021.
 - Amend the Zoning Bylaw to provide for agriculture-related businesses - This and following action item were addressed in the Rural Life bylaw draft in 2019. This was withdrawn from the Warrant and not reintroduced again since that time.
 - Amend the Zoning Bylaw to allow tourist-oriented business in the AR district, such as antique shops, B&B's, recreation businesses, tea rooms, etc. – See above

- Create a comprehensive Economic Development Plan for the Town that includes viable strategies for facilitating acceptable growth - An outline for an Economic Development plan and process has been developed and endorsed by the Planning Board.
- Adopt a Watershed Protection Overlay District for Bare Hill Pond – status unknown
- Adopt a zoning district for the Town Center which reflects the historic lot pattern and allows small businesses, second floor apartments, and moderate-density housing - Frequent item of discussion at the Planning Board and several stakeholders. Need to determine if the Town Center Action Plan (2005) needs to be updated as a prerequisite. Have held several discussions about using FBC as the tool for the district.
- Amend the Zoning Bylaw to provide authority for the Planning Board to adopt Town Center Design Guidelines - Discussed with Board but not structurally or how afforded.
- Modify the Scenic Road bylaw to include an enforcement mechanism to ensure compliance with the regulations - Multiple cases highlight the need to address. Staff undertaking bylaw amendments for Fall 2021 Town Meeting.
- Develop documentation for administering and enforcing the Scenic Road Bylaw - Some preliminary steps have been taken but no formal initiation.
- Establish a multifamily district on the Zoning Map and add district regulations to the ZBL - Has been a subject of discussion at Planning Board. 2020 Economic Development Bond Bill will require all MBTA communities to establish multifamily zoning of at least 15 units per acre. Final guidelines from state pending.
- Reduce the size of the Commercial District - Not recommended by Director; counter to economic development efforts.
- Review Select Board FY2022 Goals
 - Key goals for the Planning Board are:
 - Senior by-law
 - OSPRD (continue plan for preserving open space)
 - Creating a strategic vision for the Commercial District.
- Set Priorities for FY2022
 - Ayer Road, Commercial District, economic development
 - Open Space residential Development & Senior Housing - Spring 2022;
 - Town Center Zoning
 - Multifamily re-writing zoning and mapping
 - Rural Life/Ag Tourism
 - Re-codify Zoning Bylaw
- Future Direction and Vision

Transportation Advisory Committee Update

- Transportation Improvement Project for the repaving and improvements to Ayer Road from the Ayer town-line to Route 2 is at the 25% review phase; scheduled to commence in 2026
- Priority Plan for Complete Streets
 - Town Center – additional improvements to expand sidewalk work completed in 2020
- Safe Routes to School – have been denied grants as Harvard is too rural and does not have not enough walkers; working with School Committee to provide more information
- Park & Ride Lot – working with Montachusett Area Regional Transportation
- Commuter Rail Shuttle - Harvard is allocated funds from the MBTA to partially fund such a service but we will still need additional funding plus the location for pick up and drop off.
- MRPC DLTA grant update - This project is to update the transportation chapter of the Master Plan. It is getting a late start due to it being a 3rd round funded project, but also a backlog of MRPC projects; optimistic that it can get this done this year, but if not, will apply for a second-round next year.

- Nashoba Regional Greenways – working on additional shared land marking (a.k.a. sharrows), signage, and connection points; connection to Devens reestablished on Depot & Old Mill Road to get bike travel between Harvard and Devens

Ayer Road Corridor

- Mass DOT Transportation Improvement Project - See Transportation Advisory Committee Update above
- Vision Plan
 - Phase 1: Market Study Status; funded by the Select Board; Request for Proposal in process; goal is for release at the end of August.
 - Phase 2 will include public hearings for feedback from the community.
- Review Comments from Spring Annual Town Meeting
 - Don't over-develop like big cities
 - Water & Sewer area not viable without it
 - Urge Select Board to begin discussion with MassDevelopment

Housing

- Housing Production Plan – By meeting the goals (10%) incrementally you can hold off Chapter 40B developments; large developments assist with crediting Subsidized Housing Inventory; inclusionary bylaw would also assist in achieving this goal.
 - Implementation Tasks and Review of Goals
 - Certifying the Plan
- Senior Housing – Primary focus over the past year through bylaw amendments, which will continue over at least the next two town meetings
- Housing Choice Initiative Program – State program to assist in jump-starting affordable housing in the Commonwealth. There are currently 14 criteria that a community needs at least seven to be considered for grant funding; Harvard meets two of the 14 criteria.
- Inclusionary Bylaw – Allows a community to protect itself from unfriendly Chapter 40B development; Harvard would benefit from adopting one soon before any new housing development occurs

Protective & General Bylaw Amendments

- Fall Annual Town Meeting 2021
 - Senior Residential Development
 - Erosion Control
 - Scenic Roads
- Spring Annual Town Meeting 2022
 - Senior Residential Development
 - Open Space Design Bylaw
 - Town Center Zoning District
- Future Annual Town Meetings
 - Mapping the Multi-Family District
 - Re-codify Zoning Bylaw
 - Rural Life

Appoint Liaisons & Representatives

- Montachusett Regional Planning Commission – Donahue
- Montachusett Joint Transportation Committee – Donahue
- Community Preservation Committee – Thurston
- Historic Commission Nominee – Cabelus
- Design Review Board – Brown
- Community Resiliency Working Group – Burson
- Harvard/Devens Jurisdiction Committee – Cabelus

- Open Space Committee – Cook
- Transportation Advisory Committee – Donahue
 - Nashoba Regional Greenways – Bruce Leicher
- Master Plan Implementation:
 - Water & Sewer Commission - Cabelus
 - Conservation Commission – Cook
 - Community Preservation Commission – Thornton
 - Municipal Affordable Housing Trust - Thornton
 - Energy Advisory Committee - Burson
 - Select Board - Brown
 - Bare Hill Pond Watershed Management Committee – Cook
 - Board of Health - Thornton
 - Park & Recreation Committee – Donahue
 - Department of Public Works - Cabelus
 - Historic Commission – Cabelus

Miscellaneous Items

- Proposed FY2023 Staffing Organizational Chart - In order to provide better coverage of specific boards and also provide a more balanced structure, it is proposed to break the Land Use Boards into two departments—one for Planning and Economic Development, the other for Conservation and Board of Health.
- Montachusett Regional Planning Commission - Provides a range of services to their member local communities such as transportation planning, land use and environmental planning, economic development, and more. They are funded by an annual assessment of member communities based on population. They also receive grant funding from the state and also perform contract work for cities and towns.
- Electronic Application Filling Process for Planning Board Review – Funding currently not available at this time
- Grants:
 - *DLTA Grants* – As noted above, these are from RPAs to towns and cities and are typically small, typically \$15,000 equivalent or less for planning and economic development projects. The cycle is calendar year and applications typically are due in January.
 - *MVP Grants* – Once communities become MVP designated, they are eligible for MVP Action Grants which can be for planning, study, and construction projects (e.g., culvert replacement). Harvard has received one such grant for the KLA project in 2020 and a second in partnership with Devens and Bolton in 2021.
 - *EOEEA Planning Technical Assistance Grants* – These grants are up to \$50,000 and are for planning projects that result in some legislative change or a development. We applied for one in March for Ayer Road Vision.
 - *Mass Cultural Council Grants* – These are for a variety of cultural-related projects. One subcategory from MCC was awarded to Harvard for the Old Library roof in 2021.
 - *One Stop for Growth Grants* – This new state grant program combines all of the growth and development-related grants into one single application so that multiple element projects can be funded by a single grant. We applied for \$200,000 in 2021 for Ayer Road Vision.
 - *Mass Trails Grants* – Annual cycle of grants from the state available for trails planning and construction.
 - *Green Communities Grants* – Funds for Green Communities (incl. Harvard) for energy goals.
 - *Housing Choice Grants* – As noted above, there are a range of grants available for communities that are Housing Choice designated. Funds could be used for planning, zoning, and a range of project applicability.
 - *MEMA/FEMA BRIC Grants* – Funds for Hazard Mitigation plan development but they have a very long cycle for fund awards.

- *DCR Tree Planting Grants* – Funds for planting trees in communities.
- *AARP Community Challenge Grants* – Grants for projects that meet the criteria established in the AARP Age-Friendly Community program such as transportation and land use.
- Economic Development (Policy, Survey, Focus, Revenue, Data)
- Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness: Hazard Mitigation Plan
 - Allows you to be eligible for grants
 - Crosses over to Climate Resiliency Working Group to develop plan; working with Fire Chief to gain funding
- Website Reorganization and Development – Still a work in progress
- GIS and Mapping – ERSI program available to the Land Use office, however time to devote to maintaining skills by staff is limited

Adjourn

Donahue made motion to adjourn the meeting at 3:28pm. Cabelus seconded the motion. The vote was unanimously in favor of the motion.

Signed: _____ Liz Allard, Land Use Administrator/Conservation Agent

EXHIBITS & OTHER DOCUMENTS

- 2016 Master Plan Action Plan Implementation Matrix – August 2021
- FY22 Select Board Goals/Action Items
- Director of Community and Economic Development Update August 2, 2021
- Housing Choice Initiative
- Housing Choice Designation Guidelines
- Housing Production Plan, 2017 Table 1 – Summary of Implementation Strategies
- Inclusionary Zoning – A Tool For Affordable Housing Progress