Town Council Meeting
Minutes
April 5, 2019

The meeting was called to order at 12:20 PM

Roll Call

Councilors Svedlow, Kuhn, Asherman, Hemphill, Cahan, King and Ferrante were present. Councilor Cahan was excused to attend a personal matter, at approximately 1:00 PM.

Other in attendance – Nathan Poore, Town Manager, Godfrey Wood, Ken Nelson and Julie Motherwell.

Item 1   Workshop discussion to discuss the following: implementation of the Comprehensive Plan, processes used to evaluate proposed private developments, communication strategies (resident outreach and engagement), and how best to identify the town's vision and identity.

Councilor Hemphill welcomed those in attendance and, with Nathan Poore, introduced the agenda items, including a summary of what has been discussed in the last two workshops held on Friday afternoons.

There was a general conversation that lead up to more specific discussion about large project developments, comprehensive planning and general communication strategies. Prior to these more specific talking points, Councilors asked if we are brainstorming solutions now; and should we be inviting former Councilors into the ongoing conversations about these larger community issues. There was also a statement from Andrea – she stated that when things aren't going well, people are looking for a change in the process and that maybe it's time to change some of the way we do business.

Conversation about larger projects ensued and the following observations, suggestions and points were made.

Projects that only require Planning Board approval:

1. The Planning Board could have a threshold requirement for very large proposals that would require a more robust public notification system to gather more public input.
2. Larger projects are a big concern for residents regardless of whether they need an ordinance amendment from the Council or need only apply to the Planning Board.

Project that would require Council action such as an ordinance amendment:

3. Some of the issue is about timing and a booming economy
4. When a project must receive some sort of approval from the Council such as an ordinance amendment, there needs to be a standard list of things that must be submitted and a process that is known to all. Public outreach should be performed by the developer.
5. We need to rese research how other communities manage very large projects. Research could also include American Planning Association and International City Management Association.
6. A developer that requires action by the Town Council such as an ordinance amendment must demonstrate that there is a public good and purpose with minimal to no adverse impacts on the community.

7. A proposal should be brought forth to the Town Council as soon as possible and not via an executive session. The public should be aware of a proposal as soon as possible.
8. There needs to be a process that allows for incremental steps and incremental expenses to a developer. No developer is going to spend $250K without assurance that they are going to move forward. Incremental costs through steps will make it better for the public and developer.
9. Part of the process should include the developer answering open ended questions like: What about your project should cause us to change the rules for you?

Conversation about the Comprehensive Plan and amending the plan also included how best to engage the public, including some basic models.

The Council raised the following points about the Comprehensive Plan:

- The plan hasn't been a living document for 10 years. We need to keep the public engaged about the plan more often than the adoption of the plan.
- The plan has been the Council work plan for years so public did have some notice.
- We need to use different communication styles to call attention to the plan; in a more marketing perspective and then lead them to the actual docs.
- The plan is generally sound and shouldn't be thrown out.
- Aspects of the plan could be refreshed – it's not developed over night
- The plan is like a boat with a rudder. We need to refresh and maybe paint the boat but not switch to a train or buy a new boat.
- Are concerned with the process or the standards or both?
- We must look at the core and fundamentals. How do we get engagement?
- We will always have to deal with people not catching up until the bull dozer is in the back yard.
- Systems are very important.

The Council next talked about communication systems, public engagement systems and developing core values and identity.

- There are multiple layers of communication and system issues. We need to revise the comprehensive plan, least on our values about growth.
- People want to work on the comprehensive plan, but you want to start at a high level.
- Start in the abstract, where we are now and where we want to be, rather than initial reliance on data is appropriate now. We can rely on data and other specifics once we learn more about the abstract. The abstract will help us learn more about our vision and identity.
- Work on the abstract can happened now, along with work expected by the public on more urgent concerns such as rate of growth.

The following represents what was recorded on the flip charts:

Large Projects – Foundation for Future Policies

- Define the process in the policy so it is consistent and well understood by the public and developers
- For projects that only require permitting through Planning Board, create threshold of large project that would require a different public process. Request Planning Board input on the development of a new ordinance of policy that sets a threshold and different public process.
- Ask the public for input on any new policies developed to manage large project proposals

- Stages (projects requiring Council action) should include the following:

    1. Staff delivers policy, standards and best management practices to the developer to ensure they understand the process.
    2. Proposal goes to the Town Council as soon as possible. The developer must provide answers to the open-ended questions such as: A. How does your project demonstrate that there is a public good and purpose with minimal to no adverse impacts on the community? and B. What about your project should cause us to change the rules for you?
    3. Developer conduct robust outreach to public and gathers public input.
    4. Applicable Council appointed Committees conduct independent reviews of the proposal. Committees may include: Planning Board, Conservations Commission, FEIC, REAC, LPAC, etc.
    5. Town Council meeting to review input received from the public and committees. Town Council to establish what developer must submit for studies and other materials for future consideration by the Council and public review.
    6. If the project proceeds after step 4, the Town Council to review tool box of options such as a master plan, contract zone, tax increment financing district, or general ordinance amendment.

Models for processes that lead with abstract discussions and end with specific polices included two similar approaches.

- Community Buy In – Leads to Comprehensive Plan Update

    1. Community dialogue about anything and everything that leads to vision and identity.
    2. Data, inventory, surveys, analysis, strategies, etc
    3. Adopt comprehensive plan update

- Layer of the System to Manage Comp Plan Update and other Significant Policies

    1. Outer Layer – Communication (Council, residents, staff and other stakeholders); establishment of norms and culture.
    2. Middle Layer – Development of the comprehensive plan and other significant policies, including a foundation (vision, strategies and identity).
    3. Inner Layer – Management of acute situations
    4. Layer interactions – each layer is important and reliant on other layers as the system is designed and maintained.

The Town Council, by consensus, agreed that the next steps will include the development of a series of recommendations for next Council. They agreed to schedule one more meeting to address these topics, on May 15 at 1:00 PM in Council Chambers.

MOTION TO ADJOURN – Councilor Kuhn moved the meeting adjourn at 3:20 PM; Councilor King second the motion. Voted 6-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Nathan Poore