



MASTER PLAN COLLABORATION COMMITTEE MINUTES

THURSDAY, AUGUST 10, 2023

LOCATION: Room 6 (Veterans Hall), Pembroke Town Hall

STARTING TIME: 7:00 pm

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: Stephan Roundtree (Chairman), Steven Ciciotti (Vice-Chairman), Susan Bollinger, Scott Chaharyn, James Eng, George Grey, Curtis Kuta, Martin Lu, and Tracy Marino.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT: Sharon McNamara (Clerk) and Frederick Casavant.

OTHERS PRESENT: Matthew Heins (Planning Board Assistant), Nicole Manfredi, Patrick Chilcott, and Luke Mitchell.

OPENING THE MEETING

Mr. Roundtree opened the meeting of the Pembroke Master Plan Collaboration Committee by reading the Chairman's statement: "Please note that this meeting is being made available to the public through an audio recording which will be used to ensure an accurate record of proceedings produced in the minutes of the meeting. All comments made in open session will be recorded."

DISCUSSION WITH LUKE MITCHELL OF VHB ABOUT STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

At this time, the committee members present were Mr. Roundtree, Mr. Ciciotti, Ms. Bollinger, Mr. Chaharyn, Mr. Eng, Mr. Kuta, Mr. Lu and Ms. Marino.

Luke Mitchell of VHB, the lead consultant working on the master plan, was present. The main purpose of the meeting was for the committee and Mr. Mitchell to discuss the stakeholder interviews VHB had conducted and the online survey VHB had set up.

Mr. Ciciotti made a motion to approve the minutes of July 13, 2023, Ms. Bollinger seconded the motion, and the committee voted unanimously in favor.

Mr. Mitchell summarized the topics he intended to discuss. Then he launched into greater detail, displaying Powerpoint-type slides projected onto a screen as he talked.

Mr. Mitchell started his review of the stakeholder interviews (“stakeholder engagement”) by describing the interview VHB held about schools and youth. He noted that some residents believe the schools are underfunded, and discussed various challenges and opportunities the schools face.

Mr. Mitchell went over the housing and economic development stakeholder interview. He said that the demand for housing is very strong, and noted that Pembroke’s housing stock is primarily single-family houses though multifamily housing is growing. He emphasized the cost of land.

Mr. Mitchell mentioned that some interviewees supported creating a sewer system for the town while others wanted Pembroke to remain on septic, and asked the committee members for their perspectives about this. Conversation followed. The issue of septic systems being close to bodies of water was discussed in particular.

Mr. Mitchell noted that the lack of developable land had been mentioned by many stakeholders, and said VHB was hoping to create a list of potentially developable sites. Conversation followed, and the committee members considered the details of how town-owned land can be developed.

Committee member Mr. Grey arrived at this time.

Mr. Mitchell mentioned that the town had recently passed its “MBTA Communities” zoning bylaw amendment, and Mr. Heins clarified this. A conversation also took place about 40B projects and the town’s SHI figures.

Mr. Mitchell said that there are relatively few employers in Pembroke, and so most residents are employed elsewhere. Mr. Grey asked about people working at home in the wake of Covid, and discussion followed.

Mr. Mitchell went over the community health and wellness stakeholder interview. He mentioned that some interviewees had said that the town has a water shortage or other water problems. Mr. Ciciotti explained that some of these issues were temporary, and discussion ensued. Some of the committee members noted the diversion of the town’s water to Brockton.

Mr. Mitchell said that some interviewees had cited a lack of community spirit and places to gather together, and Mr. Roundtree expanded on this and noted the value of the community center now under construction.

Mr. Mitchell and the board members talked about the trails in Pembroke, and the possibilities to link them better and to build new ones. Mr. Mitchell noted that a great deal of funding exists for this. Mr. Grey described the need to think more broadly about the town’s trails.

Mr. Mitchell gave a summary of the town’s medical facilities, and Mr. Ciciotti noted that there is no emergency room (i.e., major hospital) nearby, the two closest being in Weymouth and Plymouth. Conversation followed. The rising presence of urgent care facilities was also discussed.

Mr. Mitchell said that many interviewees had mentioned the need to build more sidewalks and bike lanes in the town. Mr. Ciciotti expressed concern about the safety of bike lanes, and conversation followed. There seemed to be general agreement that Pembroke would benefit from more sidewalks. The possibility of multi-use paths (i.e., for pedestrians, joggers, bicyclists, etc.) was also discussed.

Mr. Mitchell mentioned the recreational and athletic facilities in the town, and Mr. Grey explained that the town is doing an assessment of these facilities and future needs. The issue of whether the town would build a skate park was discussed.

Mr. Mitchell went over the environment and sustainability stakeholder interview. He said that many interviewees had strongly emphasized that they value Pembroke's rural characteristics and natural resources.

There was a conversation about the challenge of maintaining the trails in the town (and the issue of which division of town government maintains them).

The town's recycling system was discussed.

The taking of water from Silver Lake by Brockton—a longstanding point of contention—was discussed.

DISCUSSION ABOUT ONLINE SURVEY FOR MASTER PLAN AND ISSUE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Since a member of the public was present who wished to speak about the online survey that VHB had set up for the master plan process, at this time the meeting shifted to that topic.

Patrick Chilcott, a member of the public, addressed the committee. He explained that he is a long-time resident of Pembroke and has served on many town boards, committees and commissions over the years. He criticized the online survey for focusing too much on climate change in its questions, and said that climate change was not within the committee's charter. He emphasized that it would be unfortunate for the committee's work to become political in nature.

Mr. Chilcott and Mr. Roundtree briefly debated the impact and importance of climate change.

Mr. Chilcott said that climate change, regardless of one's opinions about it, is a politically divisive issue that does not fall within the committee's purpose. He thanked the committee for allowing him to speak.

Mr. Mitchell said that mentioning climate change in the survey was not meant to force beliefs on people. He explained that if the committee is opposed to mentioning climate change in the master plan document, there are other ways to discuss environmental stewardship without using the term "climate change."

Mr. Ciciotti said that Pembroke residents are generally supportive of protecting the town's natural resources, and so this could be emphasized in the master plan without mentioning climate change. Ms. Bollinger agreed. Further conversation took place among Mr. Mitchell and

the committee members about the issue of climate change and whether it should be raised in the master plan.

Mr. Heins said that since people's opinions on climate change tend to be entrenched, lengthy debates about this issue might not be productive. He outlined three possible approaches for how the topic of climate change could be handled in the master plan document: it could be left out entirely; it could be acknowledged and modest steps to deal with it could be proposed; or it could be emphasized and dramatic changes to deal with it could be proposed.

Mr. Heins expressed his view that not mentioning climate change in the master plan would be a significant factual omission. Mr. Chilcott and Mr. Ciciotti expressed disagreement. A brief debate took place. Mr. Chilcott said he wished to raise a point of order, and conversation followed.

Mr. Mitchell emphasized that there are many other topics to cover in the master plan and the document should not be something that upsets many people, especially since without buy-in from residents it will not be implemented. He suggested that VHB prepare a draft of the environmental chapter of the master plan, which the committee could then review. The committee members were in general agreement with this.

Mr. Chaharyn, Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Heins discussed the questions in the online survey.

DISCUSSION WITH LUKE MITCHELL OF VHB ABOUT STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS AND ONLINE SURVEY

The committee and Mr. Mitchell resumed the discussion about the stakeholder interviews. Mr. Mitchell continued with his Powerpoint-type slide presentation.

Mr. Mitchell went over the cultural and historic resources stakeholder interview. He noted that many people in Pembroke appreciated the town's history. He outlined the state's inventory of Pembroke's historic and cultural resources.

Mr. Mitchell described some potential improvements that had been mentioned for the Pembroke Historical Society. Mr. Chaharyn outlined a few activities that this organization does.

Mr. Mitchell went over the transportation stakeholder interview. He noted that many interviewees had emphasized the condition of the town's roads, which are generally decent but in some cases need repaving or other improvements.

Mr. Mitchell mentioned that some interviewees had discussed the provision of water, and he said this would be covered in the draft master plan document.

Mr. Mitchell said that the town's lack of sidewalks was a problem that came up often, and asked the committee about which roads are in greatest need of sidewalks. There were various replies, and the roads near the schools were mentioned in particular.

A discussion took place about GATRA and other forms of public transit in or near Pembroke. Ms. Bollinger said that many residents are not familiar with GATRA's services. Mr. Eng described the

town's public transit options. Mr. Mitchell and the committee talked about the commuter rail system, which has three stations close to Pembroke.

Mr. Mitchell said that commercial development in Pembroke tends to be clustered in specific areas, creating possibilities for placemaking and better pedestrian access, and that VHB would examine these places (especially the town center) in the master plan process.

Mr. Mitchell summarized the Planning Board stakeholder interview. He noted a few development trends in the town, and emphasized the lack of developable land in particular.

Mr. Mitchell summarized the Town Manager stakeholder interview. He said that communication between various town departments and boards could be improved. Some of the committee members agreed, and discussion followed. Mr. Mitchell also mentioned that the town bylaws and zoning bylaws need to be updated.

Mr. Mitchell noted that the inventory of commercial properties has been growing very slowly, and actually has fallen as a percentage of total property tax revenue.

Mr. Mitchell and Ms. Bollinger summarized the economic development roundtable, which had actually taken place earlier in the day. Mr. Mitchell noted that some small business owners felt there was an absence of a business community. He emphasized the possibility of large, transformative commercial projects, and this led to further conversation.

Mr. Mitchell went on to the results of the online survey.

Mr. Mitchell noted that "natural and scenic areas" was the top choice for the question "What makes Pembroke a great place to live?" while "shopping and dining" and "economic opportunities" ranked very low.

Regarding the question "What are the biggest challenges to improving the quality of life in Pembroke?" Mr. Mitchell explained that "town infrastructure" was the highest choice, followed by "visual appeal of the town" and "vibrancy of commercial centers." He pointed out that "affordability (e.g., housing, food, taxes)" ranked surprisingly low.

Regarding the question about land use issues, Mr. Mitchell said that "loss of natural lands to new development" ranked as the top concern, with "inadequate town utility and infrastructure" second. Many of the comments submitted under "other" emphasized similar themes.

For the question "Please rate the following in terms of how important they are to fulfilling Pembroke's housing needs," Mr. Mitchell said that "accessory dwelling units" and "detached single-family homes" were the top selections. Surprisingly, "live/work units" was a very low choice.

Mr. Mitchell explained that for the question "What type of future economic development do you feel is most needed in Pembroke?" the top choice was "small retail" followed by "restaurants." Discussion followed, and several of the committee members agreed that restaurants are needed, especially in the town center.

Regarding the question “In terms of future development, how important are the following?” Mr. Mitchell said that “protection of open spaces” ranked highest, with two environmental priorities surprisingly coming in second and third.

For the question “What are the most pressing transportation needs?” Mr. Mitchell said that “improving the physical condition of the town’s roadways” ranked highest, which was not surprising considering how car-dependent Pembroke is. But “expanding/improving pedestrian infrastructure and access” and “enhancing network of trails in natural settings” were second and third, reflecting an interest in improving walkability.

Regarding the question “What are the most pressing natural resource needs?” Mr. Mitchell noted that “water bodies, including surface water and wetlands” was the top choice, with “groundwater supplies” second. Some of the comments under “other,” he pointed out, expressed concern about protecting water bodies from nearby septic systems.

For the question “Please rank each of the following town facilities or services in terms of their performance/condition,” Mr. Mitchell said that roadways/sidewalks were ranked fairly well, potable water was ranked poorly, “N/A” was the most popular choice for trash and recycling centers, police services and fire services were ranked extremely well, the library was highly ranked, the council on aging was ranked moderately well, recreational facilities and services were ranked surprisingly badly, and schools (facilities and services) were ranked moderately well.

Mr. Mitchell said that for the question “Which recreation assets do you think the town needs the most?” the top choice was “recreational trails.” He described some of the other selections. A discussion took place about pond access and amenities along the ponds.

Regarding the question “What are the most important sustainability issues facing the town (including economic and environmental)?” Mr. Mitchell noted that “maintaining sufficient cash flow to sustain town’s long-term finances and capital plans” ranked highest, with a climate-related issue ranking lowest.

For the question “How do you regularly follow town government?” Mr. Mitchell explained that the town’s official social media accounts and the town website ranked fairly high, with television programs ranking much lower.

Mr. Mitchell displayed the draft Master Plan Vision Statement, and it was agreed that the committee members would review this and send proposed changes to Mr. Mitchell.

A discussion took place about whether a Facebook web page should be created for the master plan. The committee and Mr. Mitchell also talked about the master plan website.

Mr. Mitchell went over the anticipated future timeline of the master plan process and master plan document, including the second public meeting, writing and revising of draft chapters, creation of drone aerial photos, etc.

Mr. Mitchell reminded the committee members to consider which sites in Pembroke (especially town-owned properties) could be improved or developed, and conversation followed.

Mr. Roundtree made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Ms. Marino seconded the motion, and the committee voted unanimously in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Matthew Heins, Planning Board Assistant