

Meeting Minutes

Newbury Planning Board

Wednesday, November 8, 2023

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

FINAL – Approved December 20, 2023

Planning Board Chair Larry Murphy opened the November 8, 2023 Newbury Planning Board (PB) meeting at 7:00 p.m. Murphy took a roll call of Planning Board members present: Paicos, yes; Knight, yes; Stohn, yes; Murphy, yes. Planning Director Martha Taylor and Assistant Planner Kristen Grubbs were present and stated so. Emily Innes of Inness Associates stated she was present.

Opening Statement from Chair: Murphy announced that this November 8, 2023 Open Meeting of the Newbury Planning Board was being conducted remotely in accordance with Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023, which extends the Governor's March 12, 2020 "Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A § 20," until March 31, 2025. This Order suspends the requirement of the Open Meeting Law to have all meetings in a publicly accessible *physical* location and allows public bodies to meet entirely remotely so long as reasonable public access is afforded so that the public can follow along with the deliberations of the meeting. Murphy stated that the Planning Board was convening by video conference via Zoom, as posted on the Planning Board's agenda, and provided information on how people could view and join the Zoom meeting. Murphy then described the ground rules and guidelines for the meeting proceedings and public participation. He concluded by stating that each vote taken in the meeting would be conducted by roll call vote.

Following these opening remarks, Murphy turned to the agenda: a final review of the 2023-2035 Master Plan Update - October 2023 Draft, and consideration of the Plan's adoption.

Murphy summarized the project: This update of the Town's Master Plan has been prepared by Town staff, Board members, and volunteers who live or work in Newbury, with assistance from the Merrimac Valley Planning Commission (MVPC) and two consulting firms, Community Opportunities Group, Inc. (COG), and Innes Associates Ltd.

In 2015, the Planning Board initiated the process of updating the Town's 2006 Master Plan. A Master Plan Steering Committee, comprised of Newbury residents, members of other Boards and Commissions, and Town employees, was appointed and empowered with the authority to oversee the development of the plan. With COG, the Town's original Master Plan consultant, the Committee gathered valuable input from Town employees, elected officials, residents and other volunteers through Master Plan Steering Committee meetings, public forums, focus groups, stakeholder interviews, and surveys. The consultants, together with the Master Plan Committee, then organized that information, described the concerns raised by residents, and identified the goals and strategies to remedy those concerns.

At the end of 2021, the Town contracted with Innes Associates, Ltd., to update the census-based data into the draft of the plan, incorporate the results of other planning processes that have taken place over the past couple of years, such as the Municipal Vulnerability Plan, and assemble all the draft elements into the final plan. As part of this effort, over the Spring and Summer of 2023, the public was invited to review the final draft plan and provide input in multiple ways. All residents were invited to a Community Meeting which was held at the Newbury Town Library on June 29, 2023. The presentation slides and meeting video are available for viewing. In addition, a public survey was released and open for participation from May to late June. Survey results were shared with the Planning Board and the public at the Planning Board meeting on July 19, 2023. Emily Innes prepared a document, Survey Results and Public Comments, which includes all of the public input received during the comment period up through July 14, 2023. During late summer, the Town's consultant and staff reviewed and fact-checked all

comments, making edits as needed to the final document. Innes provided a memo to the Planning Board which summarized all changes made since the June 29, 2023 Community Meeting.

Murphy stated that tonight is the Planning Board's turn to take up its responsibilities, to review and discuss adoption of the final draft of the Master Plan. Murphy explained that there would not be public input tonight so as to reserve the meeting for deliberations of the Board. Murphy acknowledged the work of the Town's planning staff in the master planning process, thanking Planning Director Martha Taylor and Assistant Planner Kristen Grubbs.

Murphy welcomed consultant Emily Innes, who also thanked staff and the Board members for their work, stating that this process has been an enormous team effort with important public input over the years. Innes described the impressive public turn-out for the community meeting over the summer and all of the extensive and thorough comments on the draft over the last several months. Innes explained that should the Board vote to adopt the Plan tonight, this action would represent completion of one part of the process, but would also begin another very important part of the process, being the start of implementation of the Plan. Innes explained the Town will need to decide whether to appoint an implementation committee, which could serve to set priorities and provide guidance to future decision-making by the community. She reminded the Board that the Master Plan is a "living document", which can be updated and revised as needs change, and can serve as a solid framework for future actions and as a guide for residents to get involved in community issues and projects. Innes reminded the Board that the timeline of the Plan coincides with the 400th anniversary of the community in 2035; what does the Town want itself to be and look like in 12 years?

Taylor commented that it has been a pleasure working with Innes, saying she has done an excellent job pulling the pieces of the Plan together over the last year or so, and thanked her for all her work.

Murphy asked Board members if they had questions. Paicos commented that this effort has been underway for quite some time and has been a tremendous amount of work. He commented it is a living document and meant to be a guide, leading into the future. There is lots of room for involvement. Knight thanked everyone who compiled the document, stating there is a lot of information to digest, and it will be a great resource to use into the future. Stohn also expressed great thanks to Innes, Taylor and especially to all residents in Town who participated in the development of this plan update. She said it is great for Newbury to have this master plan. The Town has been changing a lot but is going to change more. This Town is exploding in many new ways - new residents, culturally, education, science center, regional impact. We need to keep doing the work, and keep moving along. Stohn asked Innes what kind of response she has had from other communities in their planning processes, and how that compares to the engagement in Newbury. Innes commented that she works with many different size communities, so an "apples-to-apples" comparison is not easy. However, she has been particularly impressed by the Newbury resident engagement due to the Town's small size. There has been a great turn-out through all the stages, including through the pandemic. For people to still be interested in the last stage and thinking about what lies next is very impressive.

Murphy commented that it is a very ambitious plan: within the goals, there are 187 identified actions; 66 of these involve the Planning Department, and 28 of those are high priority. There is much work ahead. The implementation will be critical. While there may be some differing opinions about the action items, the high-level goals of this Plan are moving the Town in the right direction.

Motion: Paicos made a motion to approve and adopt the 2023-2035 Master Plan Update as presented. Stohn seconded. Members voted: Paicos, yes; Knight, yes; Stohn, yes; Murphy, yes.

Motion: Stohn made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Knight seconded. Members voted: Paicos, yes; Knight, yes; Stohn, yes; Murphy, yes.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:23 pm.

Materials reviewed at the meeting:

- Newbury Master Plan Update 2023-2035 – October 2023 Final Draft

Respectfully Submitted,

Kristen Grubbs
Assistant Planner