

Planning Process Study Committee

October 31, 2022

12-1:30 pm

Zoom Virtual Meeting

Planning Process Study Committee Members: Carla Benka, Jonathan Klein, Linda Olson Pehlke, Susan Podziba, Al Raine, Felina Silver Robison, Jennifer Sullivan, and John VanScoyoc. Committee member Abigail Hiller was absent.

Staff Present: Emily DeHoog, Kara Brewton, and Victor Panak

At 12:06, Emily DeHoog started the meeting.

12-12:15: Committee Introductions

Questions for Committee Members:

What is one thing you hope the planning process achieves?

Do you have an example of a community engagement technique that you've participated in and liked?

- Kara wants the comprehensive plan to have specific numeric goals. She said she likes virtual post-it notes when engaging a large group virtually.
- Victor hopes that the comprehensive planning process can achieve consensus or compromise on where the town should build more housing, without compromising on neighborhood character. He said he likes the idea of pop-up stands at pre-existing community events.
- Emily said she wants widespread community involvement and engagement with many different groups of people, especially those not typically involved in government. An engagement technique she liked is setting up a sign in underutilized spaces, asking the community to write what they want to see there.
- Linda wants the comprehensive plan help the town make informed decisions from analytical research. She also wants the community to reach a consensus. She said she likes place-based interaction, for example, asking people what they would like to see in the space and having them post sticky notes with ideas. She said she also likes having people photograph places they like in the community.
- John said that community engagement will be important in the planning process and he hopes that there is attention brought to figuring out what people don't like as much as what people do like. John liked Linda's suggestion of people taking photos of what they do like.
- Felina wants an agreed upon revised set of best practices with a plan to upgrade and beautify Brookline without destroying the character of our neighborhoods. She wants community outreach to create a safe and fun environment for people to engage with a clear sense of purpose.

- Jennifer wants to see the comprehensive planning process develop a strategy for short, medium, and long-term goals. She wants community engagement to utilize digital techniques to engage people that may not have heard about planning processes, be very involved in government, or be very passionate about the issues in the plan. She said these people should be engaged because the comprehensive plan will affect their quality of life and day-to-day experiences. She also said this plan will have an impact beyond the town in helping to achieve regional and state goals.
- Jonathan said he wants the comprehensive plan to significantly address and improve our housing affordability and make a meaningful impact addressing climate challenges. He also hopes to achieve a high level of consensus. Jonathan said that the community engagement process in the Housing Production Plan was a good attempt at community engagement in engaging different groups and individuals in Brookline via Zoom. He hopes that the town also does in-person place-based work and conceptualization.
- Susan hopes the planning process finds a way to help people grapple with difficult choices weighing different priorities and the limitations of resources. She said she wants the community engagement process to identify and tap into existing associational networks. In a planning process she helped design, they were able to identify who the stakeholder categories were and went to them to get their input. They also trained people from these communities to go to these meetings. She wants a process that engages and teaches the community. Susan said the community engagement process needs ask specific questions and explain limitations of different choices.
- Al is interested in allowing for abundant and affordable housing and in furthering commercial development in Brookline. He hopes to build consensus on this committee and wants to integrate previous studies and plans. He also likes the community engagement photo taking technique. Al noted that he finds value in focus groups and creating environments for people to feel safe in comfortable. He added that this involves using the same vocabulary and speaking the same language.
- Carla hopes that the planning process will end in consensus. She said she also hopes that people will be better informed about different points of view and come to respect and accept different perspectives. She added that sometimes conflicting forces are hard to reconcile. Carla said she thinks planning should be bottom up to create buy-in. She said she was not satisfied with the Housing Production Plan engagement because she didn't think that people with different perspectives were not being heard or understood. She said that community engagement should look at who is and is not being represented.

12:15-12:25: Nominate and vote in Committee Chair

John nominated Linda Olson Pehlke. Jonathan seconded.

VOTED to nominate Linda Olson Pehlke as chair: Susan, John, Jonathan, Carla, Jennifer, Felina and Al.

12:25-12:40: Presentation Comprehensive Planning & Focus of the Planning Process Study Committee

- Emily presented on comprehensive planning and the focus of the committee.

- Carla suggested that Watertown's Comprehensive Plan be added to best practice plans.

12:40-1: Review Committee Charge

Committee Tasks, Outcomes, Draft Budget, Benchmarks

- Emily presented on committee tasks, outcomes, the draft budget and timeline.
- Linda asked if the committee's role ends with the RFP or if the committee will select consultants from the RFP process. Kara said the committee may have a roll in choosing the consultants. She said we need to check in with the Select Board chair.
- Jonathan asked if the committee will be running a community engagement process or if that will be a role of the consultant. Linda suggested that the committee will possibly have a public hearing on the draft and the committee will help inform the structure of the process.
- Al Raine asked about how the committee will be able to suggest a budget to the town so soon. Kara noted that because the FY 2023 budget is being determined now, it's necessary to get placeholder budget estimates to inform the process now.
- Carla asked about the zoning reform process and how the committee will be involved with it. Kara said we need to estimate a budget for the process but the committee's main concern is the comprehensive plan.
- Felina asked where the numbers came from for the three year budget. Kara said they were estimates she received from one consultant and she factored in estimated inflation over time.
- Jonathan asked if there is any more money they could get to increase the budget. Kara said she thinks Brookline could get technical assistance but probably not grants in money form.
- Susan asked about what zoning reform might involve. Linda explained Brookline's current zoning and why zoning reform is needed. Susan and Linda discussed how the zoning reform process would be informed by the comprehensive plan.

1-1:30: Next Steps

Basic Commitments, Future Meeting Schedule, Feedback needed for next meeting

- Emily discussed next steps for the committee. The committee provided feedback that dates would be figured out via email. The committee will try to meet every other week.
- Carla asked about the difference between the comprehensive plan and the comprehensive planning process. Emily replied that the committee will be looking at the comprehensive plan scope first, then look at the process. Susan asked if the committee will continue during the planning process. Kara said that has not been decided yet.
- Linda suggested the committee allow time for attendees to comment at the beginning of meetings.

At 1:30, the meeting ended.