

**STURBRIDGE PLANNING BOARD
MINUTES OF
TUESDAY, JANUARY 8, 2019
CENTER OFFICE BUILDING**

Mr. Blanchard called the regular meeting of the Planning Board to order at 6:30 PM.

Present: Charles Blanchard
Russell Chamberland
Michael Chisholm
James Cunniff
Heather Hart
Susan Waters

Absent: Christopher Bouchard

Also Present: Jean Bubon, Town Planner
Rebekah DeCoursey, Administrative Assistant
Mary Blanchard, Board of Selectmen
Priscilla Gimás, Board of Selectmen
Michael Suprenant, Board of Selectmen
Kevin Filchak, Economic Development & Tourism
Dan Daniska, CMRPC
Rob Raymond, CMRPC
Carol Goodwin, Open Space Committee
Elissa Gelfand, Open Space Committee
Lynne Sarty Petersen, Open Space Committee

Mr. Blanchard opened the meeting and read the agenda.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion: Made by Mr. Chamberland to approve the draft minutes of December 11, 2018.

2nd: Ms. Waters

Discussion: None

Vote: 5 – 0 – 1 (H. Hart)

DLTA FUNDING

Each year CMRPC (Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission) allocates technical assistance funding to communities throughout the region. Kevin Filchak, Economic Development and Tourism Coordinator asked for the Board's support requesting funded assistance from CMRP to update Economic, Development chapter of the Town's Master Plan. In the 2011 Master Plan – the most recent update – one of the goals was to hire an Economic Development and Tourism Coordinator. With this accomplished, there are many possibilities to updating this chapter of the Master Plan. Mr. Filchak asked for the Planning Board to sign a letter of commitment for this proposed project.

Motion: Made by Mr. Chamberland for the Chair of the Board to sign a letter of commitment for the application for DLT A funding to assist in updating the Economic Development chapter of the Town's Master Plan.

2nd: Ms. Waters

Discussion: None

Vote: 6 – 0

COMPLETE STREETS

Dan Daniska and Rob Raymond from CMRPC attended the meeting to present and discuss for public comment the draft Complete Street Prioritization Plan. The gentlemen started off with a brief overview of the program and field work of the project up to date. The Complete Streets program is funded by MassDOT with the end goal of the Town being eligible of up to up to \$400,000 in funding the construction of projects. This funding is not available for state roads, which excludes Route 20 and Route 131. CMRPC is currently in Phase II of III phases (Phase I was developing the Complete Streets Policy). The goal of Phase II is to identify needs and gaps in the pedestrian and bicycle network particularly looking at connections between home, work, school, and recreational areas. The team has completed field work to better understand the general conditions of sidewalks, crosswalks, and traffic signals throughout town. The result of this field work is the draft Prioritization Plan presented tonight. Some of the proposed projects include:

- New Sidewalk: Cedar Street to School & Recreation Area
- New Sidewalk: New Boston Road
- Hall Road: New Sidewalk & Bike Lanes
- New Sidewalk: Fiske Hill
- Route 20: improved sidewalks to become ADA compliant
- New Sidewalk: Haynes Street to Public House
- Bicycle Lane: Hall Road

Mr. Daniska and Mr. Raymond went through the draft of 27 projects they identified in Sturbridge. Some of these identified sites are located on state roads and while Complete Streets funding cannot be used for those projects, the proposed projects will be passed on to the state. Questions and comments were taken during this discussion from the Board and the audience. Ms. Bubon made note that written comments regarding Great Trunk Trail connection suggestions were provided by Tom Chamberland, who could not attend the meeting, and comments from recent threads on the Sturbridge Community Facebook page were also compiled for the record.

Two residents of Cedar Street spoke up to say that they would love to have a sidewalk leading up to the school and the recreation area that would also allow them to walk down to Main Street. Another resident supported the idea, but noted that the water line runs up the west side of the street where the sidewalk is proposed. Ms. Bubon stated that there will be conflicts that arise moving forward, including wetlands along Cedar Street, and the next steps will include more detailed design work to confront these obstacles and determine the cost of proposed projects. The road into Burgess was discussed with the wetland constraints during design and construction, and the fact that very few, if any, students walk to school.

CMRPC mentioned that Complete Streets could involve putting in a foot bridge or even just a striped line to differentiate vehicular and pedestrian ways; particularly in areas where people are walking on the road anyway – this is an opportunity to make that experience safer. Mr. Suprenant brought Commonwealth Ave into Heritage Green to the attention of CMRPC for need of a crosswalk. In addition to improving crosswalks throughout town, improving or adding lighting to various areas would also improve safety. The Green Communities Program, another project being undertaken by the Planning Department, and will involve converting street lights to LEDs.

There was discussion of traffic of Route 20 and expanding the sidewalk to adequately provide room for pedestrian travel and bicycle lanes. Ms. Hart pointed out that it is difficult for two adults to walk side by side on the sidewalk in Fiskdale, let alone anyone in a wheelchair or stroller, because the sidewalk is narrow and there are many telephone poles directly in the sidewalk. Ms. Bubon reference the 2014 plan completed by Pare Corporation “Commercial Tourist District Improvement Plan” that shows the Route 20 corridor does have enough room in the right of way for pedestrian sidewalks and bicycle lanes. This 2014 plan also presented the proposal of the undergrounding the utility lines to eliminate the congestion of telephone poles on the streetscape. Ms. Bubon and the former Town Administrator worked with the three utility companies to see if this project is feasible. The first step would be to conduct a feasibility study, which was presented on the last Town Meeting warrant, was voted No Action by the Board of Selectmen and the Finance Committee, and did not pass at Town Meeting. Ms. Bubon mentioned that the town may be able to look at relocation of the poles instead of undergrounding.

OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE

Carol Goodwin, Elissa Gelfand, and Lynne Sarty Petersen, members of the Open Space Committee presented to the Board the 2018 update of the Open Space and Recreation Plan. They presented the Plan to be used as a tool for the Planning Board to use when assisting in projects throughout town. Residents love the small town character of Sturbridge and development, traffic, and lack of protection to natural resources can threaten that. The Open Space Committee works to help protect these valuable assets in town, the corridors that connect them and the environmental concerns that arise. The Committee highlighted some of the goals of the Plan, such as promoting access between the Riverlands and the Commercial Tourist District.

The Board thanked the Committee for their hard work and involvement with this plan. Ms. Hart asked if the lands had been ranked in terms of prioritization of importance. This is something that Committee has not done, but could look into, particularly regarding identifying open space parcels currently lacking any level of protection.

GENERAL DISCUSSION OF TRAFFIC CONDITIONS IN TOWN

Mr. Blanchard brought up the citizen’s petition that came before the Board of Selectmen recently to set travel restrictions on the road. Residents of Farquhar Road submitted the petition that stemmed from not only an ongoing increase of traffic on the road, but bumper to bumper traffic over the Thanksgiving holiday that included large buses and tractor trailer vehicles. Mr. Blanchard wanted to bring to light increased traffic congestion is a problem throughout town, not only on Farquhar. If the town is going to go allocate funding to move

forward with a traffic study, it should include all of town to measure the frequency and intensity of traffic throughout and how to best address this increase in traffic.

TOWN PLANNER UPDATE

- Next meeting date:
 - January 22nd: will be a joint meeting with the Board of Selectmen to discuss options for rezoning the Route 15 corridor. The meeting will start at the Center Office Building at 6:30 for regular meeting, including a Waiver of Site Plan Review for the proposed Escape Room and then will reconvene at the Town Hall for 7:15.
- Pilot Travel submitted their quarterly report and no concerns were noted.

OLD BUSINESS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

- There is a U-turn allowed again at New Boston Road. MassDOT has examined the intersection with the opening of the multi-tenant building at New Boston Road. They are looking at the issues and are exploring a couple of options.
- There is a church using space at Hobbs Brook and on Sundays the parking is very limited during that time.

On a motion made by Ms. Waters and seconded by Mr. Cunniff, and voted 6 - 0, the meeting adjourned at 7:47 PM.