



Planning Board Meeting Minutes Friday, June 30, 2023, at 1:15 pm – Remote Participation

Members Present: Diab Jerius, Chair
I-Ching Scott
Keri Layton
Sally Dale, Vice Chair/Clerk
Nicholas Rossettos

Others Attending: Richard Rohan
Emily Innes

A quorum being in attendance, Chair Jerius calls the Winchester Planning Board (PB) meeting to order at 1:15 pm noting that the meeting is being recorded via Zoom. Roll call of PB members: Rossettos, Scott, Dale, Jerius in attendance.

1. **Communication and Public Outreach:**

Chair Jerius: Introduced Emily Innes, with Innes Associates.

Ms. Innes: Outlined her understanding of the communication and public outreach concerns of the PB as summarized:

- Efforts focusing around the MBTA 3A as well as ongoing communication with the public about PB issues and projects
- Has looked over the Communications Study Committee’s November 10, 2022, Report to Town Meeting.
- Would like to hear from the PB members regarding their frustrations communicating with the public.
- From that will develop a strategy with suggested solutions and then discuss more specifically the projects coming this summer and fall.

PB Discussion:

- Need to improve communication about what the PB does: issues and projects.
- Ms. Innes noted she has served on a planning board for 10 years. It is very challenging to effectively communicate with residents.
- Also heard from a Town Meeting member that they get too much information making it difficult to process.
- Some questions are project specific. Would like official talking points to the immediate issues as related to a specific project. What is the PB allowed to say? Need to have answers for questions like what is a building going to look like, how will it impact my neighborhood, etc.
- Ms. Innes suggested a “Project Template” that provides the status and is updated as needed.
- She noted she can suggest additional tools.
- Another concern is about explaining zoning changes at Town Meeting. The policies are set at Town Meeting. In the past, the articles that the PB tried to pass got muddled. Need something that helps the PB to get the articles through.
- Ms. Innes suggested how to structure conversations and communications, to strategically target specific people and groups, educating them and recruiting their feedback and support.
- One suggestion was a pre-town meeting information session to communicate ideas. Thought was that would not work due to schedules.
- Suggestion to have a PB information packet for new town meeting members.
- The current Town Meeting Members are more divisive and confrontational.
- There is also a Town Meeting Members association forming.

- Another challenge is the elections are mid to late March and Spring Town Meeting is in April/May, leaving little time for new members to get familiar with the process and issues. PB is part of the Spring and Fall Town Meetings. The PB presents a 10-minute annual report in the Spring Town Meeting that outlines activities and projects.
- Voters used to have the opportunity to attend a forum for hearing from candidates running for various positions. The Chamber of Commerce and League of Women Voters are two organizations that provide a forum; Town Meeting members are less likely to present. Most positions are not contested.
- Schools newsletters also help with communications, but this is a limited audience. Those not involved in the schools are harder to reach.
- Suggestion to have a Master Plan-style meeting to engage with residents prior to people pulling papers to run for an office.
- Suggestion to hold this after Fall Town Meeting and before Thanksgiving. May encourage people to run for Town Meeting. Use the email list of Town Meeting members to communicate.
- Also have used the Chamber of Commerce newsletter as another means of communicating.
- Businesses also need to have a license from the Town; this list would also be another avenue.
- Another idea is to offer the real estate offices a packet on the PB for new residents.

Regarding the current projects of the PB, what are some ideas for reaching out?

- Thought to use the Farmers Market.
- Met with Raegan McCain and talked about a graphic banner with a logo and colors that will correlate with the PB. It would contain some information that will last 10 years or more.
- Goal is to reach out to all town residents.
- Many residents do not rely on their Town Meeting members to communicate concerns and get information. Want to change that. Need to reach the residents.

Additional Discussion:

- In the past, zoning changes were “lower key” and there was a trust of the people making the changes.
- The Town also has many lawyers who voice their opinions.
- Concerned about the MBTA 3A zoning changes. The language is confusing.
- Facebook pages are also used for informally communicating.
- The MBTA 3A project is one that needs community support.
- There is a 60 unit affordable housing project coming to the PB in the next month (the Civico Development Project on the Waterfield Lot).
- The zoning is hard to present; for example, the visuals of Form + Place regarding the North Main Street Project could create a negative reaction. These are possibilities and not necessarily what will actually take place. It’s an idea. This is a hard concept for people to understand.
- Suggestion to use photos with diagrams that integrate ideas.
- Reference made to Arlington’s and Lexington’s 3A communication strategies.

Ms. Innes: Plans to provide her draft outline sometime next week.

2. Adjourn:

Chair Jerius adjourned the PB meeting of June 30, 2023, at 2:15 pm.