



City Center Project Steering Committee
Tuesday, February 28, 2012 at 5:00 p.m.
The Visitor's Center
14 North Street
Claremont, NH

Minutes
Approved 3.27.2012

I. Roll Call

Present: Marty Davis, Jason Farrell, David Putnam, Robert Tatro, David Messier, Kristin Kenniston, Gary Trottier

Absent: William Greenrose, James Feleen, Tom Rock, Victor Bergeron, Keith Raymond

Staff: Guy Santagate, Nancy Merrill, Tracey Hutton, Kelly LeBlanc

Motion: to approve the amended agenda

Made By: Ms. Kenniston **Second:** Mr. Farrell **Vote:** Unanimous

II. Meeting Minutes

Motion: to approve minutes of January 24, 2012 meeting

Made by: Mr. Tatro **Second:** Ms. Kenniston **Vote:** Unanimous

III. Old Business

- Recap of Focus Groups and reports from the Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission

Ms. Merrill stated that the focus group summaries were completed by Mike McCrory, UVLSRPC. The small size of the focus groups were an asset as the members spoke freely and enlightened City staff with positive feedback as well as their concerns and issues.

The Emergency and City Services Group (all employees and residents of Claremont) was very helpful in providing an overview of the cost and difficulty in procuring items such as light poles/lighting and emergency access concerns.

The Building Contractors group was small and diverse. They brought questions and solutions to the City. Building code familiarity and educating the owner is essential. Proposing phase-based work and a pre-review with property owners might increase cost effectiveness. Educating contractors is essential.

The Committee discussed the possibility of having one more focus group to gain wider understanding from residents (renters, elderly, etc.). Chair Putnam inquired about how we would reach people and allow them to understand their asset to the situation. Residents of the City Center area would be ideal. Mr. Trottier stated that on street parking was not addressed and he has tenants that have to move their cars every few hours when there is snow due to parking restrictions. Parking for the downtown is an essential need. Mr. Farrell stated this was addressed in the business and property owner's focus group. Mr. Davis stated he did distribute letters to increase awareness and attendance. Mr. Messier stated that it might be an issue if the owners were not being given the data distributed.

Mr. Davis stated it might be helpful to have the focus group at one of the senior centers. Mr. Messier suggested a list of questions might be helpful to initiate discussion. Mr. Tatro agreed with holding the forum at one of the senior centers and proposed asking the seniors to bring a guest. The committee discussed potentially having a bus transport to and from the forum. Mr. Folta stated that the Claremont Senior Center serves lunch on Tuesday and Thursday and the Bourden Center has lunch daily. Attendance Tuesday and Thursday is approximately between 30 and 40 people.

Chair Putnam would like to address what the board is thinking to help the consultant. Mr. Messier stated that they read the packets a week ago so it's important to know in advance about the discussion topics.

Mr. Davis stated that parking is a concern as residents/tenants are using spaces that cannot be used by businesses and vice versa. This would be one of the highest priorities for the downtown and multifamily areas. Mr. Trottier stated the downtown should be viewed as a campus needing zoning that allows us to repurpose parking spaces with mixed use. There should be no restriction for building owners to find tenants based on zoning that was made in the 1960s. A financially attainable process is essential or the building will go unused and many will lose out, including the City. Often times before a new tenant leases or buys a space it was working out for the previous owners when the code was different. Mr. Trottier stated that unless a building has value it is not going to be improved. Mr. Davis stated it must be clear that a Certificate of Occupancy is a legal measure and cannot be issued until the code requirements are met. Education is the objective. Ms. Kenniston stated that the City website should be used as a tool. Mr. Farrell declared that the City needs something to 'sell' and nothing remains consistent.

Mr. Davis reported that in terms of building code, contractors are going against code to get things done for a lower cost. There is no general contractor license needed in the state of NH. Mr. Messier stated that the owner is responsible for pulling a permit, not the contractor; however the owner might not know a permit is needed even if the contractor does. Ms. Merrill stated communicating the code is needed but the property owner might not always hear it. The new code, adopted by the City of Claremont last year, was presented by the building inspectors to bring contractors up to speed. ADA regulation updates will take place March 1, 2012.

Chair Putnam concluded that the next meeting will be a session for serious brainstorming (common threads, conclusions, pros cons) on the focus groups and community forum.

- Encourage online survey work - more data
- Continued Zoning Discussion – Article “Going Hybrid”

Ms. Hutton reported on hybrid code. It would be beneficial for the committee to focus on transects that would fit the community without reverting back into a form based code. Flagstaff, AZ is a larger community with a higher budget but they also experienced an initial lack of participation in the beginning of the process. The underserved population was not coming forward so Flagstaff started their process twice to try and elevate participation numbers. Keeping zoning simple would benefit residents to assure universal understanding. In terms of being an actively walking community, the perception in Claremont is that a quarter mile is lengthy.

Ms. Merrill reported that a Change of Use triggers building codes. Zoning can also be triggered. It is not always a smooth transition from business to business or commercial to commercial. Ms. Hutton stated that the building code in some way mimicking zoning is essential. Definitions must be consistent to assure fluidity. The departments’ reference each other so if one department/definition updates the others will also update (I.e. building, planning, and state). Zoning recommendations will be specific to the city center, but definitions will run throughout the City. Small steps will be key for approval.

Chair Putnam would like a model that would look at having 3 or 4 zones ((1) industrial, (2) residential, (3) commercial, (4) institutional). What would this look like versus what we have now?

Mr. Trotter stated that if there is an incremental approach the final outcome must be known. The City Council receives monthly CCCP updates and the Planning Board is schedule to have four more hearings so that they can be informed of the process and progress of the committee.

Chair Putnam asked City Manager Santagate to confirm the group (CCCP) is developing conclusions on zoning and will be coming to council for conceptual ideas and additional phases of the project. The CCCP questioned if the comprehensive project should be completed before it is presented. Chair Putnam stated that the consultant needs expectations.

There should be no compromise on principles or beliefs, just phase or amend as the process goes on. This project needs to get done. City Manager Santagate is committed to the cause.

IV. New Business

V. Other

- Update from staff on zoning consultant

Ms Merrill reported that the online survey only brought 80 responses so far (44.9% residents of Claremont, 55.1% out of town). Ms. Kenniston asked if the survey went out through Parks & Recreation. The E-ticker, Valley News, and Valley Business Journal were also recommended.

Ms. Hutton reported that the RFQ for the consultant is under review with HUD. Once the RFQ is approved, it will go out to a list of organizations, newspapers, and individuals. Mr. Folta inquired about the cost estimate for the consultant. Ms. Hutton stated there is up to \$40,000 in the grant allocated for the consultant. Qualifications would be evaluated first and cost second.

Chair Putnam reported that a survey, Safe Routes to Schools, was distributed to students and asks for input on parking and sidewalks.

The 3D modeling component of the grant is in the coordination process. The Technical Center director has been contacted. The digital modeling will show a sampling of the community in 3D. This model will assist in identifying the types of transects the City center needs.

Ms. Merrill stated that an 11 x 17 map will be available at the next meeting depicting City owned land in the City Center area. This will allow the committee the opportunity to make recommendations on properties. Most of the lots are small and will need to be identified under current zoning to see what uses are permitted.

City Manager Santagate stated it is unknown when the National Resource Inventory will be completed. He would report the opinion of the CCCP in regards to City owned properties, general committee progress, zoning change potential, etc. if that is the wish of the committee. Government, politics, zoning and economics cause building concerns (e.g. use of first floor but not 2nd and 3rd floors if they are not sprinkled).

Mr. Folta suggested that the City Manager is not to overview the CCCP committee/project or it might appear to have a political bias from the City Manager or council. Ms. Merrill stated the CCCP can present in April.

VI. Adjourn

The committee had a consensus to leave.

David Messier had excused himself prior to the close of the meeting and there was no longer a quorum.