

Minutes
October 20, 2016
Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee

Present

Councilor Brad Fox
Councilor Maxine Beecher
Robert Foster
Barry Lucier
Peter Stanton
Quang Nguyen
Marilyn Reilly
Tom Falby
Tex Haeuser

1. Welcome

The following documents were provided:

- Minutes from the September 22, 2016, meeting
- Agenda
- RFP/Proposal Individual Score Sheet

The following documents were provided by email/download:

- Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG) West End Neighborhood Master Plan proposal and resumes
- Maine Design Workshop West End Neighborhood Master Plan proposal
- Request for Proposals

Chairman Craig Piper welcomed everyone to the meeting. Members of the Committee and guests introduced themselves.

2. Adoption of the Minutes

Maxine Beecher minutes moved to adopt the September 22, 2016, minutes; Barry Lucier seconded. Unanimous approval.

3. Briefing on West End Master Plan Interviews

Tex reviewed the Score Sheet. **Maxine** asked if the same questions need to be asked to both groups. **Tex** said no, questions will occur by listening to the presentations. He noted that he knows most of the people since he's worked with them for a long time.

Craig P. asked if he missed the GPCOG cost estimate. **Tex** said he wasn't sure if it was asked for or not. That could be a question for them. **Barry** said there was a cost in their proposal but he didn't include it on the Score Sheet.

4. Interview #1: Maine Design Workshop

The first presentation was from Vanessa Farr and Russ Preston of Maine Design Workshop.

Vanessa explained who would be included on her team, including Milone & MacBroom, and what their roles would be.

Russ worked through the group's PowerPoint presentation. He noted that they drove around the site to understand topography and traffic. They gave examples of work they've done, including those in Newcastle, ME, Mission Hill in Boston, MA, and Somerville, MA.

He spoke about their process, including their approach to citizen outreach, site analysis, setting up a pop-up studio in a central area for citizen input, the production of a Master Plan, and their final presentation and review. He reviewed a proposed schedule, beginning on October 2016 and ending in July 2017.

Craig P. asked if the project manager is a point person or if their team will attend every meeting.

Vanessa said they have a longstanding partnership of working collaboratively. **Russ** compared it to a baseball team. Vanessa would be the point person but if there's expertise needed, that person would come in. It's a flat team organization.

Brad said it's an extremely diverse community; people work a lot and have kids and don't participate a lot. How would they get people to participate?

Russ asked if they play soccer. **Brad** said kids are out, but parents you don't see.

Russ said they figure out where people have to go or where they're going so they aren't asking them to do something else—it could be going through churches, etc. There are many ways they've used in the past. The solution could be Sunday at 3 p.m. for a barbeque. **Vanessa** said they've had potlucks and set up at popular corner stores or their parking lots. In the initial stages, the Committee knows best and they customize where they will be. **Russ** said in one community there were very vocal participants that were a small minority of the demographics of the neighborhood. They knew it wasn't representative and got more people to come by making it a bike education and servicing event with two of the best food trucks. They could pile many things to get people to show up. **Vanessa** said they saw many kid's bikes in yards, they could do something like giving away helmets, have bike checks. They look to the Committee to help figure out ideas.

Russ asked about language barriers and **Vanessa** asked about translators.

Brad said there are barriers and have had translators.

Russ said one meeting they had was given simultaneously in five languages.

Tom asked how they measure the success of public meetings.

Russ said head counting is done a lot, but one question to ask is what you want to get from a public meeting—what the facilitator wants to know. That is how they judge it—did they get a different solution or information they didn't know? If they don't get people, they can connect through websites, Facebook, or telephone trees with certain people from the community.

Maxine said there are distinct areas with a large number of renters that are not as connected to the community as you'd like them to be. There's a mentality. How do you get the renters to think of it as their community too?

Vanessa said she didn't see that segmenting as obvious. They noticed Halloween decorations on a home, then nothing, then more decorations. It's critical to make that connection. In Newcastle, they distributed 750 invitations asking people to participate. They had conversations at every household and left a card behind if no one was home. The human connection drove participation. They heard people were there because someone cared enough to invite them to this process.

Brad said he feels the need to respond. He is a renter and there are many people who lived here a long time and are very involved. It's hard to get to meetings sometimes but there is a lot going on. People feel invested and get annoyed hearing they are "transients." It's his concern getting them here.

Vanessa said that is setting up shop. They start to know the community in a more intimate way. With a studio being open is 7 a.m. to 9 p.m., if lights are on they can come in. It's an amazing experience hard to relate to a Committee. Until you've been through it you can't appreciate how intense it is.

Peter said beyond planning, there's implementation. In this neighborhood you have a few large landlords. How do you get them to want to implement the ideas that the community is on board for?

Russ said they are the biggest stakeholders that need to be addressed to see what their vision is too. That doesn't mean they get more say, though. They look for a solution that's win-win for everyone. Catalyzing private investment is the best way to move this forward. They would want a conversation with them.

Peter said a couple were just bought. **Tex** said yes. **Brad** said they are Massachusetts companies.

Barry asked about scheduling the listening session in February. Many shown were in warm weather.

Russ said they adapt; there was one in the winter in Boston with hot cider. They did a pop-up in the winter with a band, ice sculptures, and an outdoor barbeque. **Vanessa** said their April event had bonfires in a pop-up beer garden. The schedule is moveable and flexible to needs.

Tex said they put a strong team together with a great presentation and proposal. The challenge is the small size of the budget. He's wondering of how many meetings they can come to.

Vanessa said in the proposal they recommend an intensive process with multi-days and a pop-up that allows them to hit the target stakeholder, groups, committees, and maybe coming in together. They are dialing in technical aspects so if they do this in a concentrated effort, they can hit the budget. They try to make meetings happen efficiently and outcome-driven.

Barry asked how many other projects they have.

Vanessa said can't speak for Milone & MacBroom, but they are wrapping up Newcastle and some private clients. There are also more communities in the process of hiring. Russ is finishing up Mashpee and two in Somerville. Their work is designed around intensive charrettes and they are good about keeping gaps. **Russ** said he doesn't come to many interviews like this. They work with many repeat clients.

Craig P. asked how much they want this project and how important it is to them.

Vanessa said it's an interesting project. She read the Comprehensive Plan and interpreted that this is an island and "have at it." There's an amazing opportunity here and she commends the Committee for digging in and wanting to up with an intense Master Plan. She believes it is necessary and sees it as an opportunity to connect the different "pods."

Russ said he's had discussions around pro-equity planning and how to do it with equity at the forefront of decision making. He thinks that's a big issue; how to bring up everyone's quality of life. There's an opportunity to do that. He spoke about the idea of how to repair the trend of auto-oriented places that don't add value. He said the juxtaposition of those issues is intriguing.

5. Break

6. Interview #2: GPCOG

The second presentation was from Stephanie Carver and Rick Harbison (GPCOG), Lee Jay Feldman (Southern Maine Planning & Development Commission), David Maynes (Richardson & Associates, Inc.), and Zoe Miller (The Opportunity Alliance).

Stephanie gave a handout with their materials and a copy of their PowerPoint presentation. She explained what GPCOG is and noted that the handout includes their annual report, which will give an idea of additional staff in the organization. She explained the team that they've put together and said it is unique because of their ability to use two regional planning organizations, both state and federal agencies, and a lot of local data. They also house Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System (PACTS).

She began with their PowerPoint and noted that their focus is on five key things: improving neighborhood connectivity, enhancing public transportation, zoning that reflects the neighborhood vision, preserving affordable housing, and involving the West End Community. She reviewed the neighborhood map.

She spoke about increasing bus frequency, simplifying zoning, and preserving affordable housing. On involving the community, they offer connections to many organizations. They work on a regular basis with state and federal agencies and local nonprofits. They have access Sustain Southern Maine and are looking to incorporate this.

She reviewed the team structure. Public engagement is a priority. She showed the proposed schedule, running from October 2016 through November 2017, noting that they can adjust and be flexible. She also showed the budget.

Tex thanked the group and said they did a great job. Things are clearly laid out. He mentioned Sustain Southern Maine and asked if there would be any conflicts.

Stephanie doesn't see any conflicts. Their Executive Director has resources and is interested in Sustain Southern Maine. She explained funding. **Lee Jay** said the model in place is something that will be reliable to develop the same process, to develop centers of opportunity. He agrees; there aren't any issues going forward using that program.

Tex asked if there's a chance of Southern Maine regional being out of its territory.

Lee Jay said no. They operate differently than GPCOG and don't rely on grants specifically. In his operation there are three people. They act as consultants to their communities and there's nothing in state law that doesn't allow them.

Brad asked about other projects they've done.

Lee Jay spoke about the City of Auburn where more density around downtown was needed and businesses weren't going to thrive on their own; they needed more density. They looked at landscape architecture. One thing that came out was a common pedestrian area that has waterfalls, stairways to the river, and a series of colored canopies. In that common space, the Auburn band plays every Wednesday night in the summer. It's a great public space and it came from that study. They did the same thing for the mall area in Auburn. The area was a mish-mash and didn't have anything that signified a gateway. From that, they designed two roundabouts that anchor either end of the mall area. They are landscape areas, planters, and signify that you are entering a certain area of the community. On the general Southern Maine Planning, they are involved in four Comprehensive Plan updates and long-range planning going on throughout the region. They are involved in all levels of Master Planning.

Barry asked what common challenges have been presented and how they were overcome, whether it was implementation or community engagement.

Lee Jay said a combination. It came in implementing; they were talking about spending millions of public dollars to carry out desired themes and infrastructure. They put together a presentation that explained the outlook and dollars, how it would be paid for, and took it on the road. They did a number of public presentations. When it came time for funding, people spoke in favor.

Tex asked how important non-transit transportation is in this planning effort.

Stephanie said very; it has everything to do with reconnecting the neighborhood. There is isolation from what's outside the neighborhood. Transportation, pedestrian transit, is a huge issue. As far as how it conflicts with vehicle transportation, there has to be some recommendations to address those issues. There has been a fair amount of planning done: Safe Routes to School, PACTS transit plan. There's a fair amount to build on.

Rick said they would love an audit with the community, walk or bike. He is involved with GIS. They could create an online map that's interactive so the community can add things. He's impressed that he sees people walking when he visits. The streets have a good flow but not a lot of sidewalks, crosswalks. Major arterials are intimidating. He would like to get people in here and start mapping and looking at options.

Zoe said they work as a coalition that involves key players in this region—Portland Trails, Soil and Water Concertation District. They can tap them for thinking partners. She sees through an equity lens; many do it because they don't have access to a vehicle or can't drive. Bringing

equity pieces in—are stops safe, convenient, comfortable to wait for transit? Using tools that partners have, trying things out and seeing how people use it and getting feedback in real time. There are multiple ways for people to participate: neighborhood nights—opportunities to get feedback.

Maxine said in areas that are mostly rental, there are disconnects. Renters sometimes don't feel like part of the community. How do we overcome this?

Stephanie said one way is to go to the source; they set up night meetings and struggle when no one comes. She's a mother and when she gets home, she doesn't want to leave the house again. She's not that engaged in her community because of that but she participates in other ways—Facebook, email, phone surveys. If there are existing meetings like Wednesday night dinners, they need to be at those opportunities and pull that information and make it comfortable for people.

Brad said you won't get a representative sampling coming to the dinners. It's diverse, different languages; actually getting out will be imperative. There's a hard working community out there.

Stephanie said they could go to a business and ask questions.

Maxine said it is their community, it is all of ours, and we want them more engaged.

David said landscape architects look at how people interact in a built environment. Post vision created and implemented, they explore how that engagement can take place. You don't necessarily need an event, there are opportunities born out of how you physically design, how to engage people when they're out. They would look at opportunities to drive that.

Tex asked what graphics they may expect to show people.

David said on communication, they are adept at streetscapes and perspectives; whatever communicates the most effectively.

Tex asked about perspective type.

David said there are various ways, sometimes using sketch-up models as a baseline to create a more real feel. They fix them to make them richer in terms of how they present; they try to get closer to how the place might feel. There are a range of computer-aided tools. They feel handwork is more expressive. While they use computer tools, the finished product is typically from their hands.

Marilyn asked if they've designed in a community that's so isolated or if this is unique.

Stephanie said at their organization, she's been introduced to a variety. She's working on Chebeague Island. Projects vary. They also work on the Portland Comprehensive Plan.

Lee Jay said while the area seems to feel isolated, any project they work on has their own challenges. The zoning brings its own challenges. What are the tools they use to fix it? It's a combination of things—a pragmatic approach. Utilizing landscape architects to bring it to life. Is it isolated? Maybe, but it's a large area with opportunity to become more. The isolation is an issue but it's the challenge.

Brad said there are a group of communities/neighborhoods: Liberty Commons and Olde English Village have pools; Brick Hill has a park. It took over a year for a bus shelter. Most of these

areas are self-contained and they don't know each other. They have the Hub but it's not representative of a bigger community.

Peter asked if these are designed to be isolated. **Brad** said yes; those who live here think about it.

Zoe said getting back to the point raised about engagement; whenever they do work in a community she gets out and talks to people. Having conversations and seeing how people use the space now, there is a lot of open space that is underutilized. Using arts is one way that is powerful—how do people want their neighborhood to look. Pop-up community events; it would be oriented towards how people already use the community.

Maxine said language will be a barrier. **Zoe** said she has experience; it's something that will have to be looked at. There are outreach workers, interpreters. There would be a period of getting the lay of the land.

Quang said safety is a concern for parents and asked how they incorporate safety relative to crime into planning.

Zoe said she's part of the healthy communities cohort looking at how to address health. There are a lot of solutions that are about design. Is it that they wish there was more lighting or feel cars are going too fast? It would be getting a better understanding of what that means and using tools available. There may be a solution that is outside the realm of a Master Plan that gets fed as recommendations—things heard from the community. **Quang** mentioned emergency boxes similar to SMCC.

David said landscape architecture looks at that—you don't want to create walls of vegetation. There's a balance of openness and edge definition. Lighting is huge. **Stephanie** said they can incorporate it into zoning recommendations.

Brad said this is a safe neighborhood and most people feel that way.

Stephanie said sometimes it's the perceived feeling of not feeling safe.

Brad mentioned that some children play in parking lots. **David** asked if that's because there's no other space available. **Brad** said no.

Peter asked about affordable housing.

Stephanie said a key is density and how to look at crafting zoning and providing incentives.

Brad said the rents in this complex start at \$1400-1600. It's expensive to live here. **Peter** said you run a risk when improving. **Brad** said that will be the fear. People are happy about market rate housing in the area.

Lee Jay asked if the City owns any vacant land in the study area.

Tex said not much. **Zoe** said they have relationships with Avesta. She thinks they are thinking on an innovative level—they are very interested in partnering with communities.

Craig P. asked how important this project is to them.

Stephanie it's important to her—it's important to work with communities. They have a new Executive Director and there's a renewed focus with becoming involved with communities and doing some practical planning. It's something they haven't done as much of in the past. They've partnered with South Portland in the past. Land use planning is her passion. She thinks their

organization and team offers many resources and she sees them carrying it beyond and helping implement some recommendations.

Zoe said she's transitioning out of working for The Opportunity Alliance. She's passionate on bringing her experience. She sees this as an exciting opportunity to figure some of this out. They won't be missing enthusiasm.

David said he enjoys public work; ratio is heavy on private and it's nice to work in the public realm.

Lee Jay said he's been in planning for a long time. Every project like this is important. To work with the community to develop solutions, it makes him feel good to help make a community better. He's worked at local and regional levels. Helping a community and leaving a positive mark, he's done his job.

Rick said in researching and visiting, there's something about the neighborhood that is compelling. He found himself getting excited about it. Looking at the maps, getting to know the areas, there are so many opportunities. He would like to be part of a process on how to improve an area. He's also ridden here to meet with Zoe on his bike. There's something about the area he likes and would be excited to work on.

7. Decision-Making

The Committee decided on a general discussion instead of scoring based on the Score Sheet.

Peter said the two groups were so different.

Brad said GPCOG should not come into a presentation without showing their vision. The first group dazzled you right away.

Peter said the riverfront they spoke of in Auburn is attractive. **Maxine** agreed.

Brad said GPCOG gives you bang for the buck. **Maxine** said they're connected. **Brad** talked about add-ons. He liked the first two people but you wonder how many people will be working on it. Their timeframe was shorter. He started out liking the first group.

Peter said he wondered if they want to reimagine this neighborhood or look at the fixes. GPCOG is about making connections and looking at the structural problems. He doesn't get a sense they are looking the same way at a huge reimagining.

Tex said there's a lot that's fixed here.

Peter said the first group he could see in Mill Creek because you want to reimagine and he's not sure how much you want to reimagine here.

Barry said he's not sure they wanted a vision now anyway; that comes later. You want the community to establish the vision. He's not surprised they didn't get that now. He has to agree that the first group was more picture, vision, marketing. They have a good approach but as far as understanding the scope and challenges, he thinks the second group is better

Peter asked about Tex's first question to the second group and if they're all part of GPCOG.

Tex said we are a member of GPCOG and Stephanie volunteered on this Committee. The connection isn't that much currently. He worked heavily on Sustain Southern Maine through GPCOG. Everything else is through PACTs. He wanted to make sure with this organization that represents all these communities and now they work on a contract with us—is there a perception

they are favoring us in their course of business. Lee Jay is with the Southern Maine GPCOG correlate. Our communities belong to GPCOG, but he's saying their brief is fairly entrepreneurial and there's no constraint. He has had conversations with the new director about conflicts; he got the impression she has a fine grain knowledge of where the lines are and knows how to not cross them. Their answer was satisfactory.

Brad said Tex knows these people and asked for him to tell something about them.

Tex said on paper, he was expecting the first team to be the blowout. In the interview they seemed a little arrogant and GPCOG was humbler. That may work better. They are connected with organizations that would be grateful for doing work with them.

Brad said The Opportunity Alliance does so much all around in the community. Everyone knows them.

Tex said the first group has Milone & MacBroom, a good transportation engineering agency. They would look at the traffic signal system on Westbrook and Gorham and Western. GPCOG is into more walking with people. GPCOG is heavily connected with bus.

Maxine said she didn't relate to the first group. She read the proposals beforehand and had decided it would be GPCOG. They have connections and to do this job they need good connections.

Marilyn said meeting with people, \$30,000 will be in the first pop-up. **Tex** said they want to keep the timeframe short and focus their involvement in a few particular days. **Craig P.** said that wouldn't be a bad thing in some ways.

Peter asked how much they paid for Mill Creek. **Tex** thought it ended up around \$100,000. They could ask for more money but will cross that bridge when they get there.

The Committee discussed money.

Bob is going for GPCOG. He's worked with them on PACTS studies and other issues, and they have expertise and knowledge. They do their homework. He's more comfortable with them.

Marilyn said the first team will have a project plan of where GPCOG is starting. They are ahead of the first group. She thinks they have a lot of problems identified.

Quang said the biggest challenge is when they get out of the house, the direction to go on Western Ave. They have to create something to turn left; there needs to be something on the left side to go to. He asked if there's a way to combine both groups—possibly pay the first to consult and use the second for the vision. He sees value in both.

Peter likes the idea. The first group was bigger than two people but maybe don't include them all. Use the right ones for consultants.

Marilyn asked how long the Comprehensive Plan is good for. **Tex** said it's updated about every ten years.

Craig P. said as for the last question, GPCOG answered it the best.

Tex appreciates the idea but it's hard to pull two competing groups together. It's better to go with one team.

Tom said the biggest difference was that GPCOG had the problems defined in their mind and the first group didn't know what the problems are and want to hear them before they go about it. The second group may be too narrowly focused.

Tex said that's the fortunate thing, the Committee got to hear both. Awarding it to the second group, they want attention on listening and visioning. **Peter** said they spent some time talking about that. **Craig P.** said we don't want to skip the dream step here.

The Committee talked about the first group's idea of opening a studio. **Craig P.** said that concept of being all in is a great idea to get the variety of everyone and they could suggest it. **Maxine** asked if people drop in to Avesta. **Brad** said yes, there's a services director. That is a good place to meet. **Craig P.** said they either work in their office but to get immersed they would be here. **Tex** thought maybe the city could rent a space.

Barry asked about process.

Tex said a motion could be recorded with a unanimous approval.

Maxine Beecher motioned that based on the interviews, it appears that the evaluation criteria established was best met by Greater Portland Council of Governments and they be awarded the bid; Bob Foster seconded. Unanimous approval.

Tex said the next step is to forward this recommendation to City Council to award the bid.

Craig P. asked about getting feedback to the first group. He doesn't want to say it was unanimous in a bad sense and thinks the comment about having them for Mill Creek should be included. **Peter** thought they would be good for Thornton Heights. **Tex** will prepare the feedback.

8. Public Comment

None

9. Adjournment