

Economic Development Subcommittee Meeting Minutes

June 8, 2022

EDC Members:	Councilor Melanie Hamblen, Chair; Councilor Cobi Frongillo, Vice Chair; Councilor Patrick Sheridan; Councilor Glenn Jones (via Zoom)
Other Members of the Steering Committee:	Bruce Hunchard, Zoning Board Chair; Greg Rondeau, Planning Board Chair
Town Staff:	Jamie Hellen, Town Administrator; Alecia Alleyne, Assistant to the Town Administrator; Brian Taberner, Director of Planning and Community Development; Lily Rivera, Marketing and Communications Specialist
Other Participants:	Emma Battaglia, MAPC (via Zoom)

Chair Hamblen called the meeting to order at 5:35 p.m., read announcements and stated that this is an EDC Plus Steering Committee meeting.

Agenda:

1. **Update: MAPC “[Franklin For All](#)” zoning reform project for Franklin Center, including the Downtown Commercial District and surrounding neighborhoods**
 - a. **Draft set of Recommendations - [Slideshow from 5/16/22 Presentation](#)**
 - b. **Updated Memo & Timeline**
- TA Hellen referenced a memo that was being projected [attached] which is an outline of the Franklin For All project.
 - This week the Strawberry Stroll is taking place; there will be a booth set up which will be the last piece of this portion of public engagement of this project.
 - We expect to receive a final report from the MAPC by the end of June.
 - We will have another EDC Steering Committee meeting over the summer. TA Hellen suggested that each member of the Steering Committee choose their top three of the MAPC’s recommendations which they’d want to see move forward first. Everything needs to follow the standard process of first going to the Town Council for referral to the Planning Board; then the Planning Board has public hearings and makes a recommendation back to the Town Council.
 - There are a couple of timely issues identified by the staff which may need to come before this committee over the summer - i.e. a huge uptick of interest in Friendly 40Bs. We are working to put together a preliminary application and will seek guidance from this committee over the summer, and hope to get the process started at the end of summer or early fall.
- Chair Hamblen requested clarification on the idea of committee members choosing their top three recommendations. TA Hellen clarified that each should pick three and if there are certain recommendations that are selected by multiple members, they are more likely to move forward. This will help us to prioritize.
- Chair Hamblen suggested the Steering Committee should identify a meeting date for later this summer. After some discussion it was decided August 10th at 6:00 PM would be the next meeting. There was discussion of what should be accomplished at the next meeting.
 - Each member needs to have top three recommendations ready with their reasoning, to give direction to the staff on how to prioritize.
 - The legislature will be done with its session by July 31st and then there will be a 10 day veto period, so by August 10th we will know whether those regulations on the commuter rail will be etched in stone, or if there are changes. This will also give us time to think through the recommendations before meeting.

This is a meeting of the Franklin Town Council Sub-Committee; under the Open Meeting Law, this subcommittee is a separate "public body" from the Town Council. Therefore, unless the Town Council has separately noticed and posted its own meeting, Councilors who are not members of this subcommittee will not be permitted to speak or otherwise actively participate @ this meeting, although they may attend and observe. This prohibition is necessary to avoid the potential for an Open Meeting Law Violation

- Ms. Wierling asked when the Town plans to do its next Master Plan. TA Hellen answered that the Master Plan and the Open Space Plan will both be starting in 2023. Ms. Wierling commented that we want to be sure these Plans and our recommendations all fit together.
- Chair Hamblen commented that she'd like to slow down, take some time with public input, review any questions or concerns that we have.
 - Ms. Wierling stated she got feedback after the second public forum that people didn't feel they had enough information to understand MBTA Communities, density requirements, zoning terms or what we are trying to accomplish. People are confused. Chair Hamblen agreed that it is confusing and asked for suggestions on how to make the information easier to understand. Ms. Wierling responded that visuals help. Show plans with pictures. Chair Hamblen commented that at the Strawberry Stroll booth there will be visuals and we can help explain it to people.
 - Ms. Wierling also commented that we should educate people on related questions such as how this project impacts taxes or town services (water, for example). We should put resources out there to answer these questions. Chair Hamblen agreed there are a lot of levels to the conversation, people have a lot of questions. TA Hellen stated we do have some resources out there but the reality is that it takes a lot of time; years of going to meetings, reading materials, and doing the work to learn, for people to understand these dynamics. There was discussion about the website and how to navigate to certain areas, i.e. Frequently Asked Questions.
 - Mr. Hunchard commented that the MAPC recommendations deal largely with housing but the survey results did not show housing as a priority, rather it showed interest in a quaint downtown (i.e. ice cream shop, theater, art gallery). More housing will breed a bigger population. Regarding water, Franklin has an enormous amount of water underground but the town is limited in what can be drawn from the ground. There has been a distribution problem, but they have made great strides getting it to everyone.
 - Chair Hamblen commented that some of the housing issues came up through the MAPC economic development study in 2019 which showed that people wanted more affordable housing. The recent survey may not have had it as a priority because people are more focused on stores downtown, but over the years housing has been a priority. There is a push for mixed use, commercial and residential.
 - Vice Chair Frongillo discussed that housing means keeping our businesses afloat and revenue to maintain services. We need diversity in housing for different income levels and lifestyles.
 - Mr. Rondeau commented that we need to take traffic into consideration. Wherever there is housing and parking there is traffic. It's a balancing act.
 - Emma Battaglia commented that MAPC is pulling in someone from the transportation team to do some impact work around traffic.
 - Chair Hamblen mentioned that at the forum there was a comment that this project wasn't something that was talked about during the election. To set the record straight, this conversation started in 2019 and we have been talking about it for years.
- There was a discussion about the MAPC recommendations.
 - Vice Chair Frongillo asked for more information on how an overlay district works. Where does it overtake the zoning of that area, and is it only in the case of a 40R?
 - Mr. Taberner answered that an overlay district is over the zoning districts that are in place. It doesn't coincide with the exact zoning district.
 - Ms. Battaglia added that if a project is coming before the board an applicant has the option to utilize the base zoning or the overlay zoning. Base zoning doesn't completely go away.
 - Mr. Hunchard commented that we have a couple of overlay districts in Franklin, Zones 6 & 7.
 - Vice Chair Frongillo discussed that the subject of parking is lacking in the study. A lot of what's been discussed regarding traffic and the stifling of development comes back to forcing developers to put an excessive amount of parking in places where we don't want excessive parking. Specifically around the downtown, walking distance to commuter rail, with GATRA access, within walking distance to buy groceries, etc., not everyone will own two cars in that area. People can live in Franklin without a car.
 - Ms. Wierling commented that she would like to see a percentage requirement included in the definition of mixed use. We should explore what a percentage requirement would look like. We want to

encourage uses that will bring people in, make sure it's the right mix. We need to know what we are recommending.

- Chair Hamblen commented that when people get confused about zoning it's difficult to read through bylaws and find a clear definition of what you can do by-right. The percentage is something that an expert could recommend.
- Mr. Hunchard commented that the mixed use bylaw is fairly recent. Mr. Taberner commented that we don't have a mixed use bylaw; we have allowed uses by-right or special permit in the downtown core. We also allow housing on the second floor and above by-right. So, in reality we can already have a mixed use development in the downtown core. And if there is a housing component then it has to be mixed use because there has to be commercial. But this is not true in Commercial 1.
- Ms. Wierling asked if we have defined what we consider to be retail use or commercial use allowed in those spaces, to be a true mixed use. Mr. Taberner responded that it needs to be defined and it is up to the Town to decide.
- Ms. Wierling commented that we want to increase housing, keep our residents, our seniors, low income populations, bring in new residents and make this a friendly town for all who wish to live here. We also need to be sure we have visionary zoning, maintain our 10%, look at traffic, see how it can all work together.
 - Chair Hamblen commented that this committee has tried to do inclusionary zoning and stated that the job of this committee is to make sure Franklin never goes below the 10% requirement.
- TA Hellen commented that this is a lot of work for a lot of people and his suggestion is that downtown stakeholders and people who are interested in this topic need to show up for those Planning Board and Town Council meetings. There is a 3 month process of input. This is complicated to understand which is why we are asking for only a few recommendations to start with. Congressman Auchincloss had great advice which was to engage locally, face to face.
- TA Hellen commented on the earlier topic of definitions that when the committee gives their top three recommendations in August, the conversation should include comments about what people hope to see in definitions, etc. and their reasons why. This will help the staff to formulate more accurate proposals.
- Vice Chair Frongillo commented that all residents should engage as much as possible but not everyone has equal ability to engage. Systems that are responsive only to the people who show up are biased towards those who have the flexibility to show up. Elected officials need to go out to engage others. We cannot overly rely on the people who are free to show up.
 - Chair Hamblen commented that anyone who is attending the Strawberry Stroll should come to the Franklin For All booth, see the recommendations, and talk to the committee members.
- Comments from resident Steve Sherlock: Regarding water - there are three podcasts on the town website that provides a lot of info about town water including the water report that just came out. Regarding Franklin For All - suggestion to make materials available to anyone who can't make it to the Strawberry Stroll or meetings etc., so that discussions can happen elsewhere i.e. the library or senior center office hours.
 - Chair Hamblen commented that she likes the suggestion of senior center office hours for an informal discussion and TA Hellen shared that June 16 at 8:30am is the next monthly coffee hour at the senior center.
 - Chair Hamblen and Ms. Battaglia discussed that the boards will be available for the Strawberry Stroll as well as the senior center hours. Ms. Rivera explained where the booth will be located at the Strawberry Stroll.

Chair Hamblen closed the meeting and accepted a motion to adjourn. Motion was moved and seconded. Chair Hamblen took a roll call vote which was approved 7-0. Meeting adjourned at 6:38 PM.

Town of Franklin

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OFFICE OF THE TOWN ADMINISTRATOR

Memorandum

June 2, 2022

To: Economic Development Committee (EDC) + Steering Committee
From: Jamie Hellen, Town Administrator
Alecia Alleyne, Assistant to the Town Administrator

Re: Franklin For All Project Future Dates

The Franklin For All project is in its home stretch heading towards completion of the diagnostic analysis. Future dates are a sketch for upcoming meetings to note, but are subject to change:

1. June 10th at the Strawberry Stroll there will be a promotional event to help discuss the Franklin For All Project recommendations with residents and festival goers.
 - a. The Planning and Community Development department will be located at the intersection of Dean Ave and Main Street, directly across from the stage.
 - b. Attendees will be able to connect with Franklin for All project staff regarding the proposed recommendations.
 - c. Enjoy a town sponsored magic mirror photo booth experience to document the fun and resident aspirations of downtown revitalization.
2. June 30th Final report due (but should be in earlier and will be released upon final receipt)
3. July/August meeting of the EDC + Steering Committee to discuss prioritization of the formal recommendations by MAPC.
 - a. Each member of the Steering Committee will be given 3 votes to prioritize recommendations by MAPC to the staff. This is an effort to allow the committee to discuss the recommendations and give the staff some initial priorities to help focus our work and alleviate the potential to be scattered.
 - b. The Committee dates over the summer have not been set. We are hopeful that at the June 8th meeting we can set those dates in July or August on an evening without additional meetings after it.
 - c. The staff will also have some additional recommendations to consider that are not a part of the MAPC recommendations that focus on areas outside of the study zone, these are issues that have arisen locally that need to be addressed or have been discussed during this process.
4. September we will begin to publicly discuss the recommendations chosen by the Steering Committee and staff.