

Master Plan Committee

January 8, 2020

Present: Joe Cerretani, Beth Ashman-Collins, Sharon Friedman, Richard LeBlanc, Lou Amoruso, Sara Walsh, Jenn Walsh, Diana Bren, Bill Clemmey, Mark Tartlon, Ryan Maxwell, Allen Bryer, Peter Kortright, Brendan Roche, Judy Foley, Walter Jenkins, Frank DelVecchio, Sally Fehervari, Cultural Council
Jennifer Goldson and Anna Callahan, JM Goldson
Jennifer Davis, Administrative Secretary, Maria De la Fuente, Planning Department Intern

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1. Meeting called to order at 7:00 p.m.

2. Discussion of Vision, Goals and Strategies

Ms. Callahan distributed the draft Master Plan Vision, Goals and Strategies statement, which was developed after the last meeting and with input from the consultant team. The strategies will be revised and resubmitted to the committee. Tonight's discussion will be about prioritizing the six strategies included in the draft; Ms. Callahan suggested thinking about what can be realistically accomplished over the next 10 years. Ms. Callahan distributed a matrix to help the committee members prioritize the strategies.

Mr. Kortright asked if there are too many strategies and if some can be combined. Ms. Callahan said there are a lot of great ideas in the draft document, but the group should focus on those items it really wants to accomplish. Mr. Kortright said some of the items are very similar and it might be possible to combine them. Mr. Clemmey said he thinks it would help if everyone goes through the document and sends their completed comment matrix to Goldson.

The committee broke up into small groups to discuss and prioritize the six strategies included in the draft.

[Mr. Jenkins arrived at 7:45pm]

[Mr. DelVecchio arrived at 8:00pm]

Ms. Goldson asked the groups which strategy resulted in the most discussion; several group responded with downtown and housing issues. She reminded the group they will each submit their individual comment matrix responses, so no opinions will be left out.

1a) Maintain the small-town character and affordability of Mansfield's built environment to cultivate a community that reflects the region's robust socioeconomic diversity

#vii) – Amend zoning to allow more flexible conversion of existing buildings to create smaller and more financially attainable housing options without increasing building density or significantly altering the appearance of existing buildings and neighborhoods, including by-right options for accessory dwelling units. Several groups agreed it would be easier to allow flexibility in existing structures than to build new buildings.

#v) To promote desired development and redevelopment, work with a design firm to create development concepts that are contextually appropriate and can showcase the development

potential of certain parcels as well as the preferred design aesthetics. Hold a regular town sponsored forum geared to developers to promote these key development opportunities that would help achieve the Master Plan vision.

vi) Improve the design outcomes of new larger development including multi-family and mixed-use including establishing a professionally-supported design review committee and updates to existing design standards including section 230-5.12G of the Zoning Bylaw regarding the Mansfield Revitalization Overlay District and other districts as applicable.

vii) Amend zoning to allow more flexible conversion of existing buildings to create smaller and more financially attainable housing options without increasing building density or significantly altering the appearance of existing buildings and neighborhoods, including by-right options for accessory dwelling units. Several groups agreed numbers v), vi) and vii) are similar and could be combined

Ms. Goldson asked if any group did not prioritize #v) and #vi). Several people said they like the goals, but felt many could be combined, such as #ii), iii) and iv) and #v) and vi).

The group discussed the potential cost of #v. Ms. Goldson said it would depend on how many sites were being studied and what the firm was asked to do.

Ms. Goldson asked about anything groups wanted to eliminate. One group said they might eliminate #i), the Community Preservation Act and small houses, saying both were too specific. Dr. Amoruso said he thinks it may be more useful to discuss ways to propose the CPA; he said the climate is different than the last time Mansfield voted it down, and there is a need to educate people about it. Ms. Goldson suggested making that goal more general, such as coming up with methods to fund things like the CPA.

Mr. Cerretani said his group didn't think there would be enough benefit to allowing small houses and was concerned the wording is too specific. Ms. Ashman-Collins said she thinks that goal could be combined with 1c), which is to promote and integrate smaller housing units.

3b) Encourage and pursue desirable development—consistent with the community's vision—in Downtown to achieve economic vitality.

Four groups prioritized #iv) *Partner with the Mansfield Downtown Business Association to conduct regular business and customer satisfaction surveys to ensure needs and desires are being met.* The group discussed the importance for the town to be aligned with all businesses, not just one group. Mr. Bryer said he has a problem with government getting too involved in what the private sector is trying to do. Dr. Amoruso said that could be phrased more generally to indicate the town could support, but not necessarily do, those things. Mr. Feck said he thinks it is important to get input from the people invested in the area. If someone is not actually a stakeholder, they don't really know what the answers are. He said he thinks it is important for the town to be involved, which can help drive policy. Mr. Bryer said there could be something like a Business Improvement District. Mr. Cerretani said the market will dictate what will happen, but the town can help plan for and react to the market. He said the Planning Board listens to people and doesn't just make decisions. Mr. Kortright said good downtowns have an involved business community and planning and zoning that do things to support it. Ms.

Ashman-Collins said the Downtown Business Association is not the only group – there are others, like the Downtown Committee, that have been talking about downtown issues.

3bi) Consider adopting stronger zoning regulations, such as special permits for larger-unit buildings, to provide greater oversight and incentivize contextually-responsive development.

Mr. LeBlanc said a lot of people have expressed interest in having some oversight on projects of a certain size. Ms. Ashman-Collins said the Planning Board gets a lot of feedback about whether a project is appropriate for a certain property, but noted the board has a limited amount of authority. Mr. Jenkins said he thinks people are excited about downtown development, but may not be happy about the results. Mr. LeBlanc said he thinks making that a special permit would be more useful than having projects go through an architectural review board.

3bvi) Couple new development with planned transportation and streetscape improvements to create a unique and unified commercial/mixed-use area in the downtown.

Mr. Cerretani said he thinks this is important for downtown. Ms. Fehervari said she would like to see things like bike racks and GATRA bus stops. Ms. De la Fuente said bike racks help to encourage bike use. Mr. LeBlanc asked if that should be under *4d) Connect commuters and residents to their final destinations through expanded pedestrian and biking infrastructure and expanded transit service.* Mr. Cerretani said he thinks it should be part of an overall planning look and would help with the town's identity, and would go along with things like signage for parking. Ms. Goldson said strategies can touch on and support a number of different goals. She said she likes the idea of a cohesive streetscape with common threads, even if the buildings are different.

3biii) Ensure the design of new mixed-use buildings provides for appropriately placed commercial spaces with enough depth to accommodate a wide range of potential tenants.

Mr. Jenkins said he understands traditional planning is to put residential uses on upper floors and commercial on lower floors, but said it may be time to reconsider that because we are moving to a population that orders things online and has it delivered. He said it may be worth discussing whether we are better off with common space or residential units on the ground floor versus having vacant commercial space on the ground floor. He said he is concerned many of the traditional downtown uses are saturated, and requiring developers to put commercial on the first floor may result in a lot of vacant downtown space. Mr. Feck said he thinks there is something wrong in Mansfield's zoning because older downtown buildings have a high occupancy rate, but commercial does not seem to be a high priority for the developers of new buildings. He said part of the problem may be the requirement for commercial to be in 50% of the first floor depth, which results in tiny commercial spaces. He said he thinks developers propose mixed-use because it can be done with a site plan rather than a special permit, so the commercial portion is an afterthought. Ms. Friedman said she thinks Mansfield needs a solid economic development plan fortified with good statistics, information about market trends and what other communities are doing. She said Mansfield should have a discussion about whether it is a small town or a city; she said some zoning issues, like TOD, are more of a city thing.

Ms. Ashman-Collins said she thinks mixed-use is important and she would not want to see residential drive commercial out of downtown, noting the loss of several businesses with the North Main/Thomas redevelopment. She pointed out that developers bring proposals to the

Planning Board, not the other way around. Dr. Amoruso said she thinks the size of commercial spaces downtown is inadequate. Mr. Feck said the 50% Mike – may not need the 50% depth requirement anymore because the economy has improved since that was adopted.

Ms. J. Walsh said Mansfield's strong schools help make this a place people want to live and said there should be more discussion about how to maintain that. Ms. Friedman said that is part of #6, Sustainable and Strong Services and Infrastructure. Ms. S. Walsh said there may be a feeling the schools are being ignored a bit, with so much attention lately on the new municipal complex. Ms. J. Walsh said the school buildings have started to deteriorate, and the department is putting together proposals for things like boilers and roofs. Mr. Cerretani asked if the school population is anticipated to go up; Ms. J. Walsh said it is not expected to go up at the moment, but will go up with new development. Ms. Goldson said the town should plan for "hopeful growth" and work to keep facilities and services at a high level.

Dr. Amoruso said he thinks it is important to work on the environmental items in **6c) Continue to be proactive rather than reactive in municipal services, schools, and capital planning.**

- i) Conduct a study to better understand trends, anomalies, and anticipated fluctuations in student enrollment and staffing demands related to its expanding special needs student populations.*
- ii) Formalize action items in the Towns Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) and Community Resiliency Building Workshop Findings Report (2019), including:*
 - (1) Continuing Emergency Planning.*
 - (2) Formally assessing bridges and dams.*
 - (3) Protecting the Canoe River Aquifer and associated town wellheads.*
 - (4) Assessing Mansfield Housing Authority needs.*
- iii) Evaluate programming types and level of service provided through regular public input.*
- iv) Act on identified and specific needs before a crisis strikes, such as implementing a Reverse 911 system and/or acquiring portable pumps and back-up power sources.*
- v) Update local and regional evacuation planning and routes.*
- vi) Update Emergency Communications equipment.*
- vii) Develop a comprehensive plan to address vector-borne diseases.*

Dr. Amoruso said Mansfield needs to have places for people to go during emergencies like floods. The school buildings are the most likely places because of their size, so the town should think about whether those buildings can handle emergencies. He said there are other issues the town might be able to help with, like people having trouble finding doctors. Ms. Friedman said the Council on Aging provides some services like that, but more could be added. Mr. Kortright said there are a lot of issues people don't think about much, like water and sewer, that would be impacted in an emergency. Mr. Bryer said in an emergency, state or federal agencies would provide services and would be integrated with the town's systems. Dr. Amoruso agreed, but said the town should have a plan to help people who have to leave their homes to a safe place. Mr. LeBlanc asked if that is something that should be included in the Master Plan. Ms. Goldson said an emergency plan would not be included in the Master Plan, but the *need* for a plan should be. She said she would talk to BETA, which is preparing the public services portion of the Master Plan, about that.

Mr. Jenkins said one of the reasons Mansfield has a favorable tax rate is its industrial parks, which are an enormous revenue generator and should not be forgotten. Dr. Amoruso said in the past, the town has had a goal to encourage more office/lab space in the industrial parks versus warehousing. He said the town should work on encouraging companies to stay here and to grow. Ms. Ashman-Collins said there have been some recent zoning changes in the industrial zones, like an increase in maximum building height. Mr. Feck said warehousing has been so successful, building owners don't want to risk taking the buildings down to rebuild for office uses. Dr. Amoruso said there is a lack of smaller industrial space for companies that do not need a warehouse-sized building. Ms. Bren said she thinks building owners in the Cabot Business Park are getting more creative about bringing smaller companies into the large existing buildings.

Ms. Goldson reminded the members to submit their comment matrix, and suggested highlighting what they would like to see, rather than what they do not want to see.

3. Adjournment

Motion: To adjourn at 9:15 p.m. (Friedman-) All in favor. PASSES

Next Master Plan Committee meeting: February 12, 2020 at 7:00 p.m.

Signature of Clerk

Date of Approval