

Master Plan Steering Committee

Tuesday, March 5, 2023

1pm

Rye Town Hall

***Members Present:* Chair Rob Wright, Howie Lazerowich, Pat Losik, Joe Perchino, Rob Patten, Ann Fox**

***Also Present:* Planning Administrator Kim Reed, Land Use Assistant, Kara Campbell, and Liz Kelly (via zoom) from Resilience Planning & Design and Nate Bernitz, UNH.**

Chair Wright call to order and Liz for an update on the community forum and responses to the online tool.

Ms. Kelly touch base on a few items. #1, chance to talk a little bit about how the community forum went in your eyes. Counted about 60 people who attended and about 50 who signed in. Curious to know everyone's impressions, thoughts and what you came away with.

Chair Wright was somewhat disappointed with the attendance, the 60 that were there quite a few were members of the committee, members of the Town's organizations that were there, very few members of public by comparison that was not on a board or committee. Encouraging people who were there asking insightful questions wanted to understand what the purpose was, and path was and came away with an understanding of how the Master Plan acts like constitution for land use boards and pleased with that.

Ms. Losik, disappointed, would have liked to see a few more people there. She thought it was so well designed and comfortable, think format just wish more people there to enjoy format. People appreciated the information. The visuals were a hit, well organized, people were comfortable sitting and working after digesting the information. Yes, it prepares us well, next. We have another week talking outreach. Look at it as a positive. People are busy and overwhelmed what is going on in Town. Shout out to Rye Civic League, they have a good organization first page, public input. I spoke with a lot of people to get public input.

Mr. Lazerowich was also disappointed with attendance, he was impressed with the presentation and impressed with those who were there going to every station and the effort great on their part, continue to be frustrated on how many people are trying to get push to the website to raise the importance to the community involved with the master plan steering committee and just don't see the return of the community jumping in and giving us their thoughts on line.

Mr. Patten commented they will let you know if they are dissatisfied.

Mr. Lazerowich comments that we have 10 days left to get that done and cannot stress that enough to the people out there.

Ms. Kelly similar thoughts and always good to get more. She thought 60 was not bad and addition with online we have 150 so far, continue pushing. Pool of 200 if you combine the online with those who attended.

Chair Wright there was some chatter on social media discontent that you did not have to verify your identity as a town resident. The complaint/observation was that you did not have to be a resident of Rye to give input and responded to by Steve Whitman and we are looking for ideas and anyone who logged in and whether you reside here or have an interest in Rye, all valuable inputs to listen to.

Ms. Reed said the chatter/complaint was that if you did not live in Rye and were not a tax paying year-round resident of Rye you should not fill it out and what Steve said was whether you are visiting here, tourist, first home, second home.

Chair Wright, you have a stake.

Ms. Reed, yes they have a stake we would like all people to fill it out.

Mr. Perchino says this is just a survey to get public input and always like more people to attend. Unless we are doing things wrong, then we are not going to hear from anyone. 200 is pretty good. Hopefully a good cross section. This is not a scientific exercise, this is just get public input. This is just data point, not meant to be scientific dataset or draw concrete conclusions from.

Mr. Lazerowich agrees and it is also a plan for the next 10 years of this town, to him so overwhelming people may not know how to react, at the same time it should be overwhelming that they should provide their input. When 98% of the people don't give us their input a good percent of that 98% of people are going to have an opinion later down the road.

Ms. Fox we are waiting for people to come to us, we need to go to them. If the principal sent out emails click on this email. Send URL code to many groups.

Ms. Reed will send it again to the school principals and also to the superintendent and ask them to send it out.

Mr. Lazerowich sent the URL to 10 of his friends asking them to send it out to 5 of their friends.

Chair Wright to the point that Rob was making earlier, he thinks two things are happening. Information overload and what are the stakes and how much getting with overload. The work we are doing informs the Land Use Boards if it is not in the Master Plan you cannot do it, in large part what they can and cannot do and same people who object to being under the purview of the land use regulations obviously, majority did not weigh in. He does not know how to make it apparent to people that the stakes are reasonably high here, this is how you get to use and enjoy your land in this town you chose to live in.

Chair Wright asks Liz if we are not unique.

Ms. Kelly says we are average. We have done a lot of work in advertising. School outreach is big. Get broader diversity. Any outreach urgency, not open forever, window is closing for this mechanism to give feedback.

Ms. Kelly next steps, attending in person April and Crystal on zoom. Sending out to all, an outreach and engagement report which is a synthesis of the feedback that we obtained online and at the forum, also includes all the raw feedback, verbatim comments. Hope to have discussion at the April report, please spend some time reading that report. In April talk timeline focus groups and thinking of that.

Chair Wright asks when will the outreach be ready.

Ms. Kelly said around March 26th and also talk in April now digging into the details more. Vision, future land use and integrated with analysis and lead to development of the plan. Talk to you about the timeline.

Ms. Losik at the April meeting when take up scenarios, alternate scenarios for the build out.

Ms. Kelly not yet.

Ms. Losik will we be talking to FB about taking that in May or June.

Ms. Kelly leads to June. Think about best processes, future land use as it relates to all feedback.

Discussion on focus groups and may not be ready now.

Chair Wright asks Ms. Kelly to stay on while we work with Nate. He states that two scenarios we are talking about.

Ms. Losik when look at overall engagement plan we are looking for public hearings by the fall and you are in the accumulation process to get ready. Are you talking about May to June? Or June and July or all three months. Where is your organization going to be because this backs us back up how long we can wait even if it is two scenarios it backs us up. We need to be concluding this by end of May.

Ms. Kelly wiggle room focus groups, fine with timeline. Encourage this group to make decision So that at April meeting can plan if focus group. Regardless they will make it work on their end.

Mr. Bernitz from UNH focus group training.

Chair Wright wants him to describe the presentation.

Mr. Bernitz passes out handouts and asks if the Chair wants him to start with strategies.

Chair Wright is there something that you can say beneficial to their organization or two separate processes.

Mr. Bernitz today is a training and would like to know more end of training. He is not educated enough to say what and how to proceed.

Chair Wright brings him up to speed by discussing the build out and based upon assumptions with that in mind.

Mr. Reed states that Mr. Bernitz is here for training.

Ms. Losik says that in April we will flush out the process.

Mr. Bernitz you are going through a continuum what envisions focus group next level.

Mr. Perchino has to leave early but before he goes wants to make sure everyone is on the same page that today is just training and no decisions on what training group will happen and what topics.

Discussion and group agrees and talk about those they may have not reached.

He asks everyone question “what is one challenge you think might impact effective facilitation.”

Everyone goes around the room and answers.

- Ann, one challenge might be for the facilitator not knowing how to listen and not be able to not respond emotionally.
- Kara, an extreme difference in opinions in the group and unwillingness to even compromise or see any common ground.
- Joe, getting folks to be fully engaged or engaged at all.
- Pat, thinking about themes and land use and what comes to my mind is when your entering the process of a focus group is to comprehend the range of the participants around the themes. So for land use, you could have someone entirely familiar with local statues or NH RSA’s to what going on at my neighbor’s house. So, how to appreciate that range and bring people together so that you can really exercise the best out of the discussion and time.
- Rob, what I wrote was widely diverse and opposing perspectives.
- Howie, get people to participate and remain focused on the topic at hand.
- Rob, think the tendency for facilitators and participants to have preconceived notions about things and not having an open mind.
- Kim, what if there is just one nay sayer that’s their whole purpose of their attendance is to disrupt.

Mr. Bernitz states all good answers. One more task on his agenda is example one read through and think what could have been done and thought of differently.

Each committee member answered.

Mr. Bernitz races through the agenda. Start by having ground rules and go around the room and let everyone know the rules and get consensus.

Mr. Bernitz role of the facilitator someone who is not a stake holder. This is your north star. Your guide managing the process. Testing assumptions is art, teasing thoughts out and group dynamics. Focus group is facilitation and there is an art to it, summarizing and keeping things on track. Think about focus groups more strategically. What is a focus group, it is more of facilitator training. He says that ground rules should be established. Focus Group is facilitation and a lot of this is broad, keeping things on track, paraphrasing. He thinks you need two people to facilitate. Assistant does not talk, they scribe, record what is being said without injecting their interpretation. Must have a good rapport with primary facilitator. Posting on a big white board or paper is one way. Recording audio is helpful but requires the agreement of everyone in the room. Both have note pads and write and take notes on non-verbal communications. Notes help with data analysis. Someone shaking their head, nodding affirmatively, sighing.

Chair Wright why not the recording serve as the scribe.

Mr. Bernitz cannot count on recording unless you ask.

Chair Wright public meeting it is required.

Mr. Bernitz you anticipate your focus groups' public meetings? Unconventional.

Ms. Losik said we have not decided that, asks Liz give us input.

Mr. Bernitz says having focus groups as public meetings would be very unconventional.

Ms. Kelly says making them public limits honest dialog, to some degree. Which is important when digging into details. It can influence how people would react.

Ms. Reed says then it would not be a planning board or master plan steering committee meeting.

Ms. Losik says it would not be a public meeting.

Ms. Reed it would be a focus group that is noticed but those who attend, can we record. Hire facilitator then one or two people from this committee attend. No quorum or it would need to be legally noticed as a meeting and recorded.

Chair Wright does not want to go down rabbit hole on this but disagrees. If in fact out shoot of a subcommittee of an elected Land Use Board and outcome results in land use ordinances and laws then, this is part and parcel, creation of the law, if someone objects.

Mr. Patten agrees with the Chair.

Ms. Losik asks if used these in master plan engagements.

Ms. Kelly answers yes. Usually, detail set of notes from sessions and recorded them in past. Even if not noticed as a public meeting, have the recording on file, if for whatever reason, it becomes conversation. Recording supplement the notes of facilitator team.

Mr. Lazerowich so does that start how we establish a focus group?

Chair Wright, what is the membership.

Mr. Lazerowich repeats his question, so does that start how we establish a focus group?

Ms. Kelly points out that the group needs to discuss.

Ms. Reed will ask Town Attorney when ready.

Mr. Bernitz talks about people who attend and types of communication. Focus Groups are more informal. It is like an interview.

Focus groups are going to make sense for some populations and not for others. Not all strategies work for everyone.

Chair Wright how focus groups are formed and responses have more depth and variety.

Mr. Bernitz what is really nice about focus groups is that people feed off each other and get ideas off one another. It stimulates the nuance conversations. Can go places don't usually in focus group better than a one-on-one conversation and there are sometimes negatives.

Mr. Bernitz it is good to find a facilitator who has working knowledge of the topic i.e. land use planning.

Chair Wright asks a clarifying question.

Mr. Bernitz depends on population. Think tactically about the "who".

Mr. Bernitz goes on and addresses the committee members that each are going to need a good answer to this by saying this is going to be your north star, why are each of doing community engagement to begin with, what is the purpose/point of all of this. Not going to put you on the spot and ask you that but it is really important that all of you involved values community engagement and understands the role of community engagement and the information you get and the overall process of master planning and then more specifically focus groups understanding why doing this versus other strategies. Why not leave it at survey, community event why not leave it at that. You are not conducting a census. Everything you are doing is based on some extent upon people volunteering which is a bias in itself. The only ways to eliminate bias is to do a census or to do a random sampling, but that is not something you are going to do. It is complicated. Misnomer to call what you sent out a survey it was more questionnaire. Talks about convention sampling as opposed to representative sampling.

Chair Wright comments on the bias then says the reason that we are doing this is because we are required to by law.

Mr. Bernitz says that you have met your legal obligations. What you are doing now is going above and beyond, so why.

Chair Wright because we are trying to do it the right way.

Mr. Bernitz who have you already reached. Some degree of data who taking data and who attended the event. Made some observations. You may not have an understanding who you have not yet reached. Take 5 minutes to brainstorm who you have not reached effectively.

Mr. Lazerowich says don't we have to know first, who we did reach.

Chair Wright says that this type of question depends on the type of person and personality of the group of people.

Mr. Bernitz said an example of a population are seniors.

Chair Wright asks is it fair to categorize people into those who are fundamentally by personality or inherent trait inclined to participate in these sorts of things versus people who are inherently disinclined. Until it causes me discomfort, I am okay to let things go on autopilot and say thank you very much.

Mr. Bernitz there are observations we can make broadly speaking about who does and who does not participate in government. We know that there are certain kinds of people more to vote, more likely to serve on board and that's socioeconomic.

Chair Wright asks if Myer Briggs quadrant to put those people in.

Mr. Bernitz going to get personality and temperament and much harder to quantify. A place to start is more categorically.

Chair Wright comments.

Discussion on homeowners versus those who have interest in the 10 year planning of Rye.

Ms. Losik if we decide to go down the path of focus groups, her question is how we get them to participate, for example elderly and she sites an example. How do we find ways to connect.

Mr. Bernitz think about those who's and ways to reach them. As opposed to throwing it out to the universe and who responds. Resilience mostly does their focus groups around topics. His experience is a little less around that and his focus groups are more around populations. Those are both legit reasons to use focus groups.

Chair Wright asks if he has a rubric how to slice and dice or specific to the community.

Mr. Bernitz says he has ideas about who tends to be underserved and under reached.

Chair Wright summarized by saying that the under represented need more of a voice and encouragement versus those that are already being represented may already be heard asks if that is what he is saying.

Mr. Bernitz puts it back on him, what does he think.

Chair Wright agree with that, love to hear the unheard.

Ms. Fox agrees that is why she thought focus groups one way to reach out to those we have not heard from: Youth, older, young families. We know who we are hearing from.

Chair Wright when we did the survey we asked a lot of questions that were open ended and there were some things that came back very loudly and strong enough to make themselves known. One of which, “to maintain the semi-rural character of Rye.” You have to be able to hold two (2) thoughts in your head at the same time, if you are in land use board because that is what people want. People also very vocal about private property rights. Gives example of elderly man with 57 acres and 2 sons and that is their birth right may want to develop for his 2 sons, who will inherit. He cannot develop it and maintain semi-rural character of Rye, it pits opposing views against each other but maybe third group that says we can do both because we have a notion of a conservation land development regulation. How do those things get teased out.

Mr. Bernitz when reaching out to populations your questions need to be broader, cannot get into the weeds. Conversations about parsing what to do about regulations, that is what Town Government deals with, you can talk about more knowledgeable stake holders. Focus Groups think about work around thematic ideas and pressing ideas like the example you just brought up. Tailor things to different populations and different levels of knowledge and familiarity. This stuff leaves a lot of questions.

Chair Wright this meeting that we are sitting in is derivative of a land use board which is town government, definitionally. We are trying to listen; same time as filter the loud voices so we can hear the small voices so we can hear it all and this is a way to get to the small voices.

Mr. Bernitz look at your community engagement planning tool: Interviews, story telling stories, these are all techniques that are all appreciate to reach underserved populations. Whereas surveys can be as well, useful to those who cannot make it out to an event. Public meeting or public forum good for certain people, you reduced barriers, did a lot of great work to reduce barriers for participants but there are inherent barriers. Can only do so much to overcome. When do population focus groups you can think very specifically about that population like when, how, where for that population.

Mr. Bernitz jotted down some ideas for focus groups: Business community; seniors; youth; high-school students; low-income residents similar to renting population; the non-profit religious community; municipal staff; working parents and families; snowbird population.

If conducting focus groups of snowbirds in April, how do it.

Ms. Losik stated that is an important part of our population. There are more than 600 homes, a big piece.

Chair Wright out of 2700.

Mr. Bernitz you know none of them were at that community event, some have filled out the survey. He does not know this community well, that is a generic list. You need to do the work for Rye.

Chair Wright asks if a population is people who would like to be here and cannot because of limiting factors very low percentage rental housing, real estate exceeds their wherewithal.

Mr. Bernitz states that is a tough population to reach, can reach indirectly people in 20's looking at homes. But to reach people who currently have little to no connection to Rye but theoretically would like to live here, that's hard to target. They are welcome to take the survey, attend events not sure how to target.

Mr. Lazerowich said it is hard enough to get the people who live here.

Mr. Bernitz says two (2) ways to reach population groups: homogenous and mixed groups. Homogenous is a group of seniors. Mixed is topic based regardless of their population but based on something else. Factors to consider are trust and comfort. What makes them most comfortable and how make trusting environment in a focus group. What is going to make people comfortable saying what they think in a focus group, that gets at who else is around them, who is facilitating and where you are hosting it, all kinds of different things. That is huge most important. You can consider dynamics considering gender, age, power cliches, scheduling, capacity. As a group how much capacity does this group have to organize focus groups? Each focus group requires work, requires facilitators, requires organizing logistics of inviting people, following up with people, communicating with people before and after it is no small thing to have a focus group. That example we talked about, Example 1, they did not have a good concept of their capacity.

Ms. Reed thanks Mr. Bernitz because this is important so that we can grasp what is entailed in a focus group so that we can decide if we are going to do it or not. If so, how.

Ms. Losik states she very much agrees. Understanding the breath of this and what happens.

Mr. Bernitz says you are trying to do things in a compressed timeframe. That means distribute work amongst the committee but in a compressed timeframe it is important to be very thoughtful what you have the capacity to do.

Mr. Patten asks is ideal size.

Mr. Bernitz getting to the how, how to invite people to the focus group. For example, seniors cast a wide net. Problem limit how many you can have. Or nomination process but that can be complicated. Use intermediaries who would nominate. Random selection is another method. Anticipate those who say they will be there about 10-20% are not going to come and do not want more than 10 people usually 6-8 and more than 10 is a disaster. Also need to think about incentives for participation. Incentives help limit barriers.

Chair Wright asks what is everyone's fundamental motivation to do this to begin with. Some are self-motivated, others would not do it unless compelled by force. Our experience has been, most people don't want to get involved even though they have an opinion, a lot of time after the fact. Is there some magic in conveying the benefit to being involved if even for a little bit and convincing your neighbors to be involved a little bit.

Mr. Bernitz states there is only so much you can do to spin a narrative/story about the benefits, focus on reducing the barriers and anxieties. Someone may not want to participate because they fear they do not know enough. That is something you can address in your communications, talking to people who don't know enough. Some people have confidence, others self-doubt.

Chair Wright states, or an example that the have no confidence what they said will make an impact.

Mr. Bernitz communicating with people afterwards is important and you can earn their trust, over time.

Ms. Losik work with Liz if we decide to go with this on Themes.

Ms. Reed asks the committee what they want to do? Digest this? The When?

Mr. Bernitz the when do not need to talk about. He says he would like to spend some time on the questions themselves. Typical Focus Group less than 10 questions. 8 is a sweet spot. Aiming for something between 45 minutes to an hour and half. How long, dictates number of questions. People in focus group will not see the questions. Questions need to be easy to understand, short and to the point.

Ms. Reed asks what if someone wants the questions.

Mr. Bernitz says you can list one at a time. Three types of focus group questions on the list. Exploration questions get to the meat of the discussion. Engagement and Exist questions. "Are there other recommendations" is an exit question. "What is your favorite place in Rye" is an engagement question, it is a softball question. Start with softballs before hard questions. You can have people draw, doodle, one-word answers. You need at least one engagement, two explorations and one exit.

Chair Wright's take away, what do you want deep answers to and who engage to respond and that may be multiple populations.

Mr. Bernitz from scientific standpoint you want same questions. What not detailed is the art of facilitating is the probing questions. People need your help, you are guiding the process.

Mr. Bernitz wants the committee to submit the evaluation and get it back to him.

Ms. Reed says send the evaluation to her and she will forward to Nate and then to Liz she says that at the April meeting they will decide how to proceed.

Ms. Reed thanks Nate Bernitz.

Motion to Adjourn.

Respectfully submitted,
Kim Reed, CFM
Planning & Zoning Administrator