

LONG RANGE PLANNING COMMITTEE

Thursday, April 8, 2021

9:30 a.m. – via ZOOM

Members Present: Chair Steve Carter, Katy Sherman, Rob Wright & Alternate Patricia Losik

Also Present: Planning/Zoning Administrator Kim Reed and Julie LaBranche from Rockingham Planning Commission

Members of Public: Tom Pfau, Dominique Winebaum, Victor Azzi, Scott Marion, Stacey Smith and Lisa Sweet

I. Call to Order

Chair Carter called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m.

II. Review the questions that were sent to the Select Board to be shared with other Boards, Committees and Commissions

Chair Carter explained that the questions are simply proposals. The idea is to send the questions out to the boards and committees to get feedback on which should be used for the survey or visioning session. He is sure that they will hear feedback from the Select Board, but it is also important to hear from these other groups about what kind of things they would like addressed in the visioning session. He continued that the Committee also needs to figure out what they need to work on between now and the visioning session, which appears to be happening in September when more people are back in town. He asked if they should do a survey between now and then to collect more information prior to the visioning session to keep the focus on what the Committee is trying to do. He pointed out that there is not going to be a lot of time during the visioning session and they will need to be focused to get information. This was his intent for proposing these questions.

Member Sherman noted that she did not see the Zoning Board of Adjustment on the list of boards who should receive the questionnaire. She feels they should be added.

Planning/Zoning Administrator Kim Reed explained that the ZBA was not excluded. It was left with the understanding that she was going to work with them, since they are elected officials and she is their zoning administrator. She further explained that the list was prepared to get the Select Board's help to get the questions out to all the select board appointed committees.

Alternate Losik suggested going back to Rockingham Planning's proposal and looking at Appendix A. It would be her suggestion to clarify a timeline that would mesh with Appendix A

to be a rough outline of anticipated dates and process. When this was presented to the Select Board, Selectman Winslow thought they were great questions, were open-ended and was kind of a call out to residents. However, these are not the survey questions, at least that is what she took as being the intent. She commented that they are open-ended questions to get the conversation going. She continued that Ms. LaBranche had laid out some suggestions, based on the December conversation, about how she saw this process moving through; especially, under the back drop of Covid. She thinks it would be helpful to have a broad outline of where the Committee is going, in order to present this to the Select Board and the Planning Board. It will also be helpful to the broader citizenry to understand where the Committee sees this process going right now. Also related to that is where this process has been. It would be connecting the dots of where the process has been and where it is going.

Chair Carter agreed this was a good idea. He noted that the questions were really meant for the visioning session. They are not necessarily the survey questions, but they could be. The idea was to have an online survey that people could complete so the Committee could get some feedback before sitting down with people, in order to have a more fruitful discussion.

Julie LaBranche, RPC, commented that she is a little confused about the purpose of these questions. The questions are intended to be sent to boards, commissions and people who are in elected and in volunteer positions that represent the Town. However, the questions are geared more towards an individual as a resident about their thoughts and feelings about certain things. She asked where the questions would fit in, if they are going to do a broader survey to the general public. The questions are not geared towards asking the boards and commissions what have been challenges over the years and where can improvements be made in the community. She commented that she does not think sending these particular questions out to boards and commissions is going to be useful. She reiterated that the questions are geared more towards the general public, not how they view their position as a board or commission member to reach the goals and objectives of their respected board.

Chair Carter explained that his thought was that these questions would go to the boards and commissions just to get feedback on the questions; whether they feel these are the right questions or others should be included. These questions are more for the general public, but he wanted to hear from other groups to see if other things should be included.

Member Wright stated that his recollection of the conversation was that these are the kinds of questions they were proposing to ask to get feedback on whether content should be edited or deleted before it went out. These are to be submitted to various boards and committees as proposed content for input.

Planning Administrator Reed noted that the Select Board approved the submittal of the grant for RPC just two weeks ago. Perhaps, the questionnaire should be put on pause and they should go back to Appendix A. She reminded Ms. LaBranche that she had asked the Committee to reach out to other boards while they were waiting. This is how the questionnaire came about. Maybe

the Committee has gotten a little off track and they should turn the floor to Ms. LaBranche on how to move forward.

Chair Carter agreed.

Ms. LaBranche commented that five questions would not make a survey. She thinks this needs to be relooked at and expanded. The questions are very open-ended and there are not a lot of specifics being asked. Her first suggestion is that this needs to go into an automated survey format. She thinks the boards and commissions can weigh in on what the survey is like and review it when there is a draft of the survey online. She continued that a survey to the boards and commissions would be very instrumental, if the questions are geared towards their perspective. Asking them to give feedback from their perspective, in their official role in the community, is the most valuable thing this Committee could ask them to do. The questions should be very specific about their role and furthering the vision for the community.

Chair Carter reiterated that these questions were really meant for the visioning session. They were not meant for the survey or for the committees to respond to. These were meant to be conversation starters where people at tables could discuss. Maybe these questions should be put aside for the time being.

Alternate Losik pointed out that in Appendix A, Task 1, there was discussion in regards to three surveys. She thinks she is hearing Ms. LaBranche say that the idea of reaching out as a group for the rich, robust and foundational information that can be gleaned from the boards and committees is important. That could be survey 1. Survey 2 would go to the general public. She is also hearing that the perspective of these questions would be part of the visioning session process. She asked how so.

Chair Carter explained these questions were simply to facilitate the actual visioning session. These are really conversation openers that facilitate the discussion during the visioning process. This would be the third step of getting feedback from people. He commented that if they come in with specific questions, he thinks they are going to be criticized for having predetermined where the conversation is going to go during the visioning session. His impression of the visioning session is that it should be more open-ended when it starts off. It will then focus down when they get into the conversation. He noted that the intent of the questions was to be inclusive, open-ended and to invite people into the discussion, so people do not think the decisions have already been made before every getting to the visioning session.

Ms. LaBranche summarized that one survey would be to survey officials, staff, boards, commissions and committees about their roles in the community. The second survey would be to the general public asking them some very broad-based questions. The results of that survey would be aggregated and presented at the visioning session, along with some of the conversation starter questions.

Referring to the survey to the general public, Member Wright asked if the content and probing would be directed at specific identified areas of concern.

Ms. LaBranche confirmed. She stated that an example would be; “The current visioning chapter contains (list major purposes and/or goals). How would you rank those today? Are they relevant? Not relevant?” The people would give some feedback about what the current visioning chapter actually says. This would be a huge first step to get people to start thinking. She continued that the survey should lead people through a series of questions that will help them come out at the end with a well-rounded perspective going into a visioning session.

There was some discussion about how the questions for the surveys would be structured and how it would be presented to the public.

Speaking to Ms. LaBranche, Chair Carter asked her what a timeline would be for proceeding, assuming the visioning session might happen in September.

Ms. LaBranche stated that she will create a spreadsheet of the timeline with all the tasks. It will go through each month of the contract and list the benchmarks for each task. It will lay everything out in a general sequence of events and process. She commented that it will take awhile to put the first survey together. The first task for this group would be to send her suggestions for questions. She would compile that feedback and come up with a draft survey. Once the Committee vetted the questions, it would go into a final format and be put into a public survey platform, which would provide a live link for the Committee to try to see how it works. She noted that it could take two months to put a survey together. She continued that the first task of putting together the public survey could be paralleled with putting the questions together for the boards, commission and committees. She could take a stab at doing those questions and send them to the Committee for review.

Member Wright noted that there are some comments in chat from people who are on this meeting who are expressing expertise and the desire to help.

Chair Carter commented they are always looking to have help. He continued that Mr. Marion’s question (in chat) is a good one. Chair Carter stated that he does not want to put together a survey, put it out, then have the whole discussion become about the survey and not the questions in the survey. He would rather get some input ahead of time from various groups about the right questions for the general public and revise them. He wants to be sure they get the right questions. They need to figure out how to get some feedback from other folks before a survey is put out.

Alternate Losik pointed out that there was some conversation at one time about a subcommittee. She thinks there may be some folks at this meeting who may be interested in serving on the subcommittee. She pointed out that Dominique Winebaum has written several informational pieces on the process of the master plan.

Member Sherman asked if this would be a subcommittee to help make the questions for the survey.

Alternate Losik replied that she is not proposing any specific task for the subcommittee. She is talking more about structure. The subcommittee process was used in regards to the wetlands several years ago. There was a broad membership in the subcommittee. They worked for an entire season on proposed changes to the wetland ordinance. There are a lot of benefits to creating a working subcommittee under the LRP. Great information can be garnished from a diverse group of people. It worked really well. She feels they were able to achieve more in a really great working organization with that subcommittee.

Chair Carter commented that he is open to this idea and would be happy to work with this type of structure.

The Committee agreed that a subcommittee is a possibility, given the interest in this process.

Chair Carter suggested that LRP, or a portion of the Committee, would meet with the subcommittee to vet and develop the survey. If adjustments are needed for the process or survey, they can make the adjustments, so they have a good product going forward.

Ms. LaBranche asked if LRP would have the ultimate approval of the final survey.

Alternate Losik pointed out that under the Rules of Procedure, LRP has approval.

Chair Carter agreed.

Ms. LaBranche stated that one thing that comes to mind is the sharing of files and materials. Doing it by email can be clunky and difficult with receiving different comments and track changes. There are platforms that could be used where everyone could talk to each other and have access to the draft materials; however, it wouldn't be public. She thinks if there is going to be a big group there needs to be some sort of file share platform to keep everything coordinated.

Member Wright stated that from a process perspective it feels to him that all of this should be public. He is hearing there are interested members who aren't on the LRP Committee who have expertise and would like to participate. He is all for that idea. He would like to see it be as public as possible without it getting bogged down with an overwhelming amount of input.

Member Sherman agreed. She thinks they can get things done in a meeting like this and let the public know about the meetings. She thinks they would like to get the survey out to the community by the beginning of June. They need to start forming the questions. She wonders if the Rye Newsletter would be a good place to start. She does not think that everyone even knows what the visioning chapter says. It may be a good idea to publish the full visioning chapter in the newsletter to let the public know what they are working on and ask for input.

Alternate Losik commented this is a great idea.

It was noted the deadline for the next newsletter is late May.

Ms. LaBranche suggested a summary with a paragraph or two with a link to the visioning chapter on the website. The newsletter can talk about its purpose and how it is structured. She continued there is nothing wrong with letting people know that a subcommittee of the LRP is meeting to develop a survey where people can tune in and listen. However, if a survey is being created for the public, the general public should not have input into the survey questions. She noted that she has worked on a lot of projects like this and it is not done in a public manner. It's done with a committee and they are appointed. If LRP wants to elect some members of the public to be on the subcommittee, that's fine, but they will be official members of the subcommittee. Anybody can come and listen to the conversation, but they would not be part of the adjudication process of deciding which questions go into the survey. That would be a conflict of interest.

There was discussion on the process of forming a subcommittee for LRP. It was noted that this has to go back to the Planning Board to let them know that LRP wants to form a subcommittee. The LRP Committee should come up with a charter outlining the goals, task and parameters of the subcommittee. A letter outlining the parameters will then go out to the people who will be serving on the subcommittee. It was agreed that the charter for the subcommittee should go through all the way to the end of the entire process.

Chair Carter opened to the public for comments.

Stacey Smith, 51 Central Road, asked for a summary of what the subcommittee is for.

Chair Carter explained it is to help vet the survey for the general public. The subcommittee will help vet the survey for the boards and committees. They would probably help review the results of the survey. They would also help with the visioning session and with editing the visioning chapter as it is developed.

Planning Administrator Reed suggested naming it the 'Visioning Subcommittee'. The tasks of the Visioning Subcommittee, under the RPC contract, are to submit surveys, review surveys, help with the timeline of holding a visioning session for the public and help with gathering the responses for the end result of a visioning chapter for the Town Master Plan.

Alternate Losik pointed out that the subcommittee has to be chaired by an LRP member.

It was noted that the LRP subcommittee will have public meetings with agendas that are legally noticed. Minutes of the meetings would be taken, which will be available to the public, LRP Committee and Planning Board. The chair of the subcommittee will report to the LRP and everything will funnel back to the Planning Board on a monthly basis.

Scott Marion, 71 Washington Road, stated that the process of the subcommittee does not have to be complex. It's product driven. The product is a clear charge for what the group wants to know and questions targeted to those particular areas. It will go back and forth and then the full committee will weigh-in. He noted that if it is targeted for June, there is the Town Deliberative Session and the School Deliberative Session. If this is timed so it can be publicized at that time, there will likely be more participation than not. He thinks it will just be a matter of a few meetings and some people doing some work. He noted his interest in helping with the process.

Dominique Winebaum, 52 Cable Road, expressed an interest in volunteering as a member of the public. She continued that the process of visioning started back in September, so they are already eight months into it. There is already a budget. There is a scope for the project of visioning, which is a very specific goal. She wants to make sure that everyone has a chance to be a part of the vision statement. She noted there is some misinformation about the vision in the PREP Grant. It says the last visioning session for Rye was in 2002. In looking at the 2007 Master Plan, in the introduction it says there was visioning in 2002, 2004 and 2005. The Master Plan states a visioning date of 2013. That visioning is not valid because it was updated by the Planning Board from the 2007 Master Plan. Also, what is not mentioned is the 2016 visioning for the Climate Adaptation Chapter. There was visioning done for this chapter. The other thing that has not been mentioned is the community design charette. She would call that visioning. All of that visioning should be accounted for. They need to figure out what kind of visioning has been done in the past; what is valid and what is outdated. The other thing that concerns her is the timeframe. According to the grant, it is going to take a whole year before there is a visioning chapter. Then there will need to be some thought to updating the Master Plan. It has to be decided what the timeframe is starting from A to Z. In terms of demographics, there needs to be a really good idea of what that is for Rye.

Chair Carter commented that they are just getting started on this process. The information from the design charette would be useful. Some of the other things were just updating chapters to make them current with regulations. Some of that was not quite a visioning.

Lisa Sweet, Energy Committee Member, noted that her involvement would be as a member of the Energy Committee and comments would come from them.

Victor Azzi, 1100 Old Ocean Blvd, expressed his interest in volunteering to help.

Ms. LaBranche suggested a small group of people to develop the survey; possibly, Stacey Smith and Scott Marion, as they seem to have experience in this field. That group, with her help, would develop the questions and report back to the LRP. The citizens who are volunteering, should be part of the LRP, as citizens, as part of the visioning chapter and not part of the survey group. These people could be appointed as ad hoc members of the LRP for the duration of this project. This would help streamline the process.

The LRP Committee agreed with Ms. LaBranche's suggestion. They also agreed that the first order of business is to bring this to the Planning Board at their meeting on April 13th, in order to get their agreement to proceed.

Ms. LaBranche agreed to put together a timeline for the different tasks and to send it out to Planning Administrator Reed immediately.

III. Next Steps

- LRP to bring report back to the Planning Board at their April 13th meeting. The proposal is to have Scott Marion and Stacey Smith work with Julie LaBranche to draft questions for the survey, which will be brought back to the LRP for review.
- People who are interested in serving as an ad hoc member on the LRP Committee should reach out to Planning Administrator Reed.
- Julie LaBranche to work on a Gantt chart.
- LRP to meet with the Select Board on Monday, April 19th to discuss the process and steps for the visioning session.
- Chair Steve Carter to be copied on correspondence.

IV. Other

Julie LaBranche explained that the Master Plan Vision update process is a little fragmented right now because they do not know the status of the PREP Grant. The RPC contract is a small contract. The final end product of that contract is doing the public and town official surveys. Then designing and implementing a public visioning session to get public feedback. It was not to update the entire Vision Chapter. It was to create a new framework for an update of the chapter. If the PREP Grant is received, they will extend the timeline and will be able to do the actual update of that chapter.

Adjournment

Chair Carter adjourned the meeting at 10:05 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Dyana F. Ledger