

ASHLAND PLANNING BOARD
PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES --DRAFT
MASTER PLAN: 3 CHAPTERS
APRIL 4, 2011

Call to Order: Chairman MacLeod called the hearing to order at 6:34 PM.

Roll Call: Present –Susan MacLeod, Gordon McCormack Jr., Alternate Paul Branscombe

Others Present – Michael IZARD from LRPC, David Ruell, Eli Badger, Jane Felton, Steve Felton, Frances Newton, David Toth, Mike McLaughlin, Susan McLaughlin, Nicole Poitras, Joan Poitras, Alice Staples, Frank Stevens

Chairman MacLeod set procedure to review each of the chapters with Mike IZARD giving a brief summary of how the chapter was developed, and then open it to comment from the public.

1. Chapter 5--Recreation: Mike IZARD explained the process has been to have PB members fully participate in gathering information for the chapters, inviting other town departments and groups to be involved in conversations regarding the contents of chapters relevant to them and getting feedback on drafts. This chapter was drafted by Planning Board member Susan MacLeod, based on the previous Master Plan (1984), interviews, and research on easements in town. On main discussion was around if there is a need in Town for additional recreation space and what it would look like. There seemed to be a lack of understanding of what use the conservation land could be used for recreationally. The research is reflected in this chapter, showing quite of lot of green space, and how it compares to other NH communities. Are residents aware of these opportunities for recreation? Should it be promoted? Not being centrally located within downtown, access can be an issue. Should there be more available downtown? Interview with Parks and Recreation director also brought up questions and recommendations for community-centered activities. Chapter also refers to state recreational standards for towns to be considered. These are the keys points in this chapter.

Question: Does the Master Plan get into timeframes to get things done? *Answer:* It has been discussed that there be an Implementation chapter to outline action (the who, what, when) on all the recommendations.

Question: Wouldn't it make sense financially to have a Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) as a recommendation?

Answer: Yes, and other chapters do have that recommendation. It's great that a CIP passed at Town Meeting, which is the fiscal equivalent of a master plan. An Economic Development committee is also forming, reflecting a lot of positive energy happening.

Question: Will a Master Plan allow us to establish a tax increment financing district in portions of the town?

Answer: Master Plan doesn't disallow it, but it's not one of the specific items addressed, but it could be included in two of the last chapters being developed, Economic Development and Natural Resources. We need more education on this to see how it might work for Ashland.

Question: Any discussion on the reuse of the railroad tracks for recreation or transportation? *Answer:* No. It is difficult to utilize track that is still considered active. *Comment:* Some portions are used as a snowmobile trail.

Comment: The charrette results are just out and many points regarding recreation (and other issues) in that document dovetail with the Master Plan.

Question: This chapter doesn't talk about the school facilities—is there a reason for that? *Answer:* The brief paragraph doesn't mention if grounds (playground, trails) are open to public use. Gym is available by arrangement. **Follow-up on public availability with SAU to include.**

Comment: For the conservation land mentioned in the SE part of town, the New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF) does encourage use of those trails for hiking, snowmobiles, and hunting; only motorized, wheeled traffic is prohibited. There is also a lake for boating, fishing on Holderness/Ashland line, although parking is limited. People are more familiar with the Reynolds parcel in Holderness, also owned by NEFF.

Question: No recommendation about encouraging more conservation/recreational lands; in Natural Resources?

Answer: Could also be in Recreation chapter, as the financial value of conservation land is mentioned (p.5-5).

When this was discussed, the Select Board representative was more discouraging than encouraging about additional land in conservation. With Current Use there are recreational opportunities, but it's not permanent.

Add recommendation to encourage exploration of land suitable for protection for recreational use.

Question: The downtown park is Memorial Park? Can more Town activities be held there? *Answer:* Memorial Park is governed by a separate Board of Trustees. Town can and does work with board. Currently the downtown revitalization group is in discussions with the trustees to move the Packard bell into the park.

2. Chapter 6—Community Facilities: The starting point for this chapter was an outline from Pat Tucker and Dari Sasson of LRPC worked to itemize the existing and future needs of all town departments; the descriptions are from the department heads' perspectives. This information plays into the CIP as well. The facilities and equipment were ranked from under- to over-capacity, and then recommendations were formulated. Page 6-10 itemizes the meat of the chapter (the facilities capacity summary). The most interesting is the library situation with its unique arrangement with the building trust. There are some decisions the Town needs to make regarding this space issue. The Town Hall was also big part of discussions regarding the underutilization of the existing space due to its inaccessibility to upper floors, and the limited space for the police department.

Comment: There is mention of energy audits and handicapped accessibility, but not of compliance with fire and safety codes.

Answer: Excellent suggestion to **include an outline of what needs to be done to be compliant with fire/safety.**

Question: What is process for CIP, and how can the library be included?

Answer: The process for next year's budget starts by creating a future needs plan. Once the CIP committee convenes you will be asked to meet with them for guidance and input. The Board of Selectmen is scheduled to begin this process at their next work session.

Comment: The information about the library on p. 6-9 is inaccurate (outdated). *Answer:* Yes, an email with updated information was just received and will be incorporated. Discussion on wording of paragraph referring to "decline" in use—inaccurate, or worded so it sounds negative. **Numbers based on 2010; asked library representative for updated numbers to be sent to be incorporated.**

Comment: Nothing in here about the school buildings. There is currently discussion about the condition of/energy use in the gymnasium. Generally the classrooms are in fairly good shape. *Answer:* We were working with what the school administration sent in response (to survey?). It's not uncommon that schools work as separate entities with their own boards and budgets, and are not well represented in Master Plans. **Follow up with Dari about information he got and whether he could get more details. Incorporate facilities into chapter.**

Comment: How much public access should there be to a school building (library, gym) after classroom hours?

Answer: In the past, the gym was open (unlocked) for public use, and there were incidents of misuse and vandalism. Now it is just a matter of getting permission from the principal to use for recreation or an event. [This meeting being held in school building]. **Could also be listed as cultural resource in next chapter.**

Comment: **Another recommendation could be the formation of space needs committees for the departments (library has one) that are overcapacity.**

Comment: The Fire Department doesn't mention its building is the **Emergency Operations Center** for the Town, and its effect on the building (housing EMD material). *Response:* A good point that **should be included (contact FC Steve Heath)**. And, the school building is now the designated shelter. This is a recent development and a **description will be supplied by Paul Branscombe to be included.**

3. Chapter 7—Cultural and Historical Resources: Mr. Izard explained that David Jeffers worked on this chapter with the PB and largely with David Ruell on the historical content. Eli Badger supplied the photos. The Historic Society has done also of important work and a follow through to create a walking map of historic Ashland would bring this information to a new level. There was a brochure done last year that has been successful, but it did not incorporate the work done by the Historic Society. Hope is that this will be the next stage for a self-guided walking tour.

Question: Is current map on the website? *Answer:* No, but will look into getting it posted.

The Planning Board brainstormed about the cultural aspect: what the culture of Ashland is, wants to be, what is already existent; the organizations in town.

Public Comment: Left out a few groups: the Ashland Community Center and the Friends of the Library who do programs as well as help the library. By the time this published, the Grange will be gone.

A few picky points (David Ruell): **Page 1, last line, Ashland's Historic Commission oversees the Whipple House (town owned). The other 2 museums are owned by the Historical Society. Page 2: 4th paragraph, Rueben Whitten House probably not eligible for National Register. Page 3, delete last sentence, top of page : The Historical....properties. Under Nationally Designated Places, mention the "Old Town Jail". (contact David Ruell for details?) "Rueben Whitten" has misspelling (Whittin) on map. Suggested to print map in 11"x17" format to fold. Adjust contrast for black and white.**

Comment: The draft doesn't have page numbers (running heads) that need to be added.

With no further questions, Chair MacLeod closed the Public Hearing at 7:38 PM.

There will be another hearing scheduled to review the updated chapters.

Thanks to all for attending and contributing.

Minutes taken by Susan MacLeod

DRAFT