

**Town of Freetown
Master Plan Committee**

Minutes of the Tuesday, April 25, 2023 Meeting

Held hybrid at the Police Station Community Room, 15 Memorial Drive, and Zoom

Present in Person: Nicolas Velozo, David Crose, Keith Mello, Patricia Kelleher-Parker, and Charles Sullivan.

Present over Zoom: Trevor Matthews.

Call to Order: Nicolas Velozo called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

Note: As this meeting was conducted as a hybrid and a member participated remotely, all votes taken were by roll call.

Introductions:

SRPEDD members present are Maria Jones (Public Engagement & Communications Planner), Chris Welch (Sr. Comprehensive Planner), Amber Davis (Sr. Comprehensive Planner), and Phillip Hu (Principal Comprehensive Planner). The Committee members introduced themselves.

Organization of the Committee

Mr. Velozo asked if anyone would like to volunteer as a chair. Mr. Matthew's stated he would Vice Chair the committee. Ms. Kelleher-Parker asked what the chair position would entail. Mr. Velozo said it's essentially running the meetings, calling them to order, keeping track with the agenda, and keeping the meetings on point. Mr. Goodwin expressed interest in the chair position. It was noted that Gregory Goodwin has been appointed as a member, but is not sworn in yet and cannot vote at this meeting.

A motion was made by Keith Mello, and seconded by Patricia Kelleher-Parker, to appoint Gregory Goodwin as Chair and Trevor Matthews as Vice Chair. The motion carried unanimously.

Presentation about the Master Plan Process by SRPEDD

Phillip Hu is the project manager and leading the team on the Master Plan (MP). Mr. Hu stated that half of SRPEDD's role is coordinating regional wide plans, and the other half is helping local communities with their long-term planning. Mr. Welch explained a master plan is a wish list for a town to accomplish goals in a certain time frame, usually about 10 years. The MPC will provide guidance for public policy and decision making. It's a great opportunity for the committee to assist in public engagement and communication, develop a plan that reflects and supports Freetown's priorities and goals, and serve as local champions to help promote the plan.

Ms. Jones discussed the timeline of the MP, and stated Freetown is at the kickoff phase. Research was done on the planning that's occurred in Freetown, and the MPC was established. Next is the discovery phase, where they'll present their ideas to the public. They'll host an open house and a community survey will be done to obtain the public's input. It's important to have people engaged in their local government. In the feedback phase, it's writing the plan and sending out more topic-based surveys and a traveling workshop series. In the review phase, the finalized draft will be completed and presented to the people in the fall of 2024. It would then go to the Planning Board for implementation.

Mr. Crose asked if the plan needed to be accepted by the Town by a vote. Mr. Hu replied no. Mr. Crose asked about the Planning Board, and Mr. Hu said it's genuinely good when a Planning Board votes to adopt it. Ms. Kelleher-Parker requested copies of the slides being presented. Mr. Goodwin asked if this would be one big project or smaller projects being assisted by vendors or companies to achieve small goals. Mr. Hu said the MP is divided by a high level of abstract goals and what the strategies are to get this done. When presenting a strategy, SRPEDD would show here's how we can implement these ideas and how to leverage state funding or grants to get these done. Mr. Mello asked if other communities are in the middle of plans. Mr. Hu said a MP should be done once every 10 years. Ms. Jones said Plainville, Swansea, and Rochester are currently in the middle of their plans. Mr. Hu said Lakeville completed their plan in the last one to two years. Mr. Crose mentioned the Strawberry Festival in June would be a great place to engage the public. Mr. Hu affirmed it's on their list to attend.

Mr. Welch went over the existing conditions analysis. They used maps through the GIS system, gathered data from the census and American Community survey, and literature reviews on Freetown. Ms. Davis mentioned they mapped out Freetown's assets, meaning what makes the community livable, like housing, land use, historic inventory, natural resources to name a few. Ms. Davis went through the different land uses and Mr. Hu explained the categorization of the legend. Mr. Velozo asked what vacant meant on the legend. Mr. Hu noted it's the land use code, from the assessors database, meaning there's no development on the land but doesn't include open space. Ms. Davis observed Freetown is predominantly residential zoning. There's a low housing stock due to the large lot requirements. A big part of the MP is to protect Freetown's natural resources, like water habitats.

Mr. Welch discussed Freetown's data series. The Town is growing but at a slower rate than average. The senior population is also growing but it's on par with the rest of the region and state. The Town's median income is higher than the region and state. Student enrollment has steadily declined over the past 10 years and transportation and warehousing dominates Freetown's job market. Mr. Welch mentioned literature was obtained from both local and regional planning data. The MP is about compiling all the work being done into one cohesive story.

Mr. Welch talked about the next steps. The summer engagements will take place at the Lakeville Festival (May 29th) and the Strawberry Festival (June 18th). An Open House kick-off will be planned in September. Mr. Velozo asked what is an Open House kick off. Ms. Davis stated it's to welcome the public, and unveil what the MP is all about. It's a more in-depth conversation. From this information, they can develop bigger goals and strategies. Mr. Hu noted the summer engagements are smaller activities, asking people what they love about Freetown or what they'd like to change or improve in the Town. Ms. Kelleher-Parker asked, at the Open House, would they give people a chance to start writing on the maps or place sticky notes with their questions or ideas. Mr. Hu said they'd welcome the direct feedback. He'd like to show it to the committee before the open house to ask does this make sense, what are the best questions to ask, etc. Mr. Goodwin mentioned having knowledge on the state of affairs, The town's efficiency, the state of an area or state of a building could cause some uncomfortableness but also excitement for the residents. It's important that people know we're moving forward, and it's not just a small group making these decisions. Each citizen's voice counts. Ms. Kelleher-Parker said using social media, like the Town's website, would be informative. Mr. Hu said the information should be up and running prior to the first public engagement. Mr. Velozo talked about the MBTA and how people may not be aware this is coming down from the state. He expressed this is good timing for SRPEDD to be involved. Mr. Goodwin noted with the MBTA coming in, people could be concerned about population growth, public safety, and what Freetown could look like in 5 or 10 years.

Mr. Welch asked the committee what they'd like SRPEDD to focus on for the MP. Mr. Goodwin said to look into what our greatest assets are and our biggest resources. Mr. Matthews noted the lack of Town sewer has led to an economic decline in Assonet. No new businesses moving in, restaurants and businesses closed, and buildings torn down. The Selectmen have been working on getting grants for engineering design work for a sewer going down Main St. He'd like SRPEDD to verify the hunch they're going on is correct before bringing this to Town and spending money on it. Mr. Matthews also mentioned lot sizes prevent high density building. He would like to know how we compare, in lot sizes, with other communities. Changes have been discussed in Town meetings, but have failed. It's a hot button issue and if lot size requirements change in the MPC, we need to approach it in an insightful way. Mr. Matthews would like to know how do we prepare for 40R as it will change the town immensely. We need to communicate this is going to happen, how do we all work together so we can do what's best for the Town. If the Town doesn't adapt to the zoning change, the state will sue the towns if they are non-compliant with the 40R. Mr. Velozo agrees with Mr. Matthews that we lose businesses because there's no sewer. In regards to lot sizes, Mr. Velozo is opposed to smaller lot sizes. We need to be careful what communities we look at (to compare) as we don't resemble Taunton, or Rochester. He also mentioned a need for 55 and older housing. Ms. Kelleher-Parker asked if there's a way with senior housing to put it together with the 40B, and try to accomplish both goals. Mr. Hu mentioned there's a number of ways to create income restricted housing. A "lower case" affordable looks into what can a family afford. There are different ranges of income based on people's employment. The second is "capital A" affordable which is income restricted housing like in the 40B. Mr. Hu would like to see both of these in place. It'll be looked into during the process. Mr. Mello would like the lot sizes to stay the same. He wants Freetown, in 10 years, to feel the same. It's a small knit community. Mr. Velozo said the infrastructure would have to be in certain zones. Mr. Sullivan read the Lakeville MP, and utilities are mentioned such as water districts. It's something to look into to see how it might be feasible to operate through a water district. Ms. Davis stated this is what they want to accomplish, having smaller events to get the community to voice what's important to them. Ms. Jones

said they want to preserve the Town's sense of pride and bring unity between East Freetown and Assonet. Ms. Kelleher-Parker voiced establishing a bike path that links East Freetown and Assonet.

Mr. Welsh wanted to know the concerns the MPC might have for the town's future. Mr. Mello was concerned the Town would be too big and how it will look like tax wise. Mr. Crose focused on concerns with the Town buildings. Town Hall isn't handicapped accessible, and one library doesn't have plumbing. Mr. Matthews added he doesn't want a fast-food restaurant or people only stopping for gas in Freetown, He'd still want a community feel.

Mr. Welsh asked what the MPC would like to know more about. Mr. Goodwin asked once the information is gathered and completed, what happens at the 10-year mark. Mr. Hu said not all Towns complete everything in the 10-year period, the next committee can ask what has been done, are these still the priorities of the Town and how has the Town changed or not changed. Mr. Welsh stated the 10 years isn't a mandate. Ms. D'Antoni said it's a guide to what the Town wants staff to work on and what they want to see in the future. Mr. Goodwin asked who's funding the MP. Ms. D'Antoni explained it's partially funded through a \$75,000 state grant from DHCD (Department of Housing & Community Development), and partially by SRPEDD with \$60,000 from DLTA (District Local Technical Assistance Program) funds, also from the state. Mr. Goodwin asked what are some key points that come up in other towns. Mr. Welch is trying to catalog all the MPs they're working on, to try and answer this question. Mr. Hu explained a lot is consistent across the region, like wanting guidelines to preserve open space, as small towns are passionate about certain things.

Mr. Welsh questioned what is the best way to get people engaged and excited about the MP. Ms. D'Antoni said she posted an interactive map on Facebook for the Complete Streets program and she received a lot of engagement from it. Also, providing surveys so community members can offer feedback if they can't attend a meeting. Mr. Hu stated surveys have been doing well. They'd like to have a good cross section of different people respond to them. Ms. Kelleher-Parker asked if they are anonymous. Mr. Hu said they normally ask for contact information so they can update them on the MP. Ms. Kelleher-Parker said surveys can be left in the COA and the library. Mr. Matthews said he could mention them during the Selectmen's meeting. Ms. Davis noted they could have a traveling workshop at a local charity, non-profit group, or a community club in town. Ms. D'Antoni explained the Committee will have their own YouTube page. The meetings will be recorded, whether they're hybrid or on Zoom, for the public to view. The meetings are being conducted as a regular Board/Committee that has to adhere to Open Meeting Law.

Set Next Meeting Date

Ms. D'Antoni asked if the Committee wanted to set the next meeting date for August or September. It was agreed to set the date in July for an August meeting. The meeting will be held on a Tuesday with a 6:00pm start time. The Committee consented to having a hybrid style meeting.

Any other Business Properly to Come Before the Master Plan Committee

Mr. Velozo asked if the committee should have a second vice chair position. It makes sense in case a chair member can't attend a meeting.

A motion was made by Keith Mello, seconded by Nicolas Velozo, to appoint David Crose as a second vice chair. The motion carried unanimously.

Meeting Adjourned

A motion was made by Charles Sullivan, seconded by David Crose, to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 6:35 p.m.

This is a True Record by me.

Attest: _____
Deanna Hayes, Senior Clerk

