

UNAPPROVED MINUTES



TOWN OF WARNER

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Planning Board Meeting Town Hall- Lower Meeting Room Monday, October 27, 2022 7:00 PM

I. OPEN MEETING at 7:00 PM.

ROLL CALL:

Board Member	Present	Absent
Andy Bodnarik	✓	
Karen Coyne	✓	
Ben Frost (Chair)	✓	
James Gaffney	✓	
Don Hall (Vice Chair)	✓	
Ben Inman	✓	
Lois Shea (Select Board)	✓	

In Attendance: Janice Loz – Land Use Administration

Also present: Mike Tardiff (CNHRPC), Matt Monahan - via Zoom (Warner Circuit Rider)

II. Capital Improvement Plan

A. Department of Public Works (Tim Allen, Director)

Tim Allen reviewed 2023 CIP for the Department of Public Works (DPW). He started with the Roads spreadsheet.

Andy Bodnarik noticed an error in the footnotes. Don Hall, Vice Chair, asked about the two-million dollars allocated last year and what was it spent on. Tim noted roughly \$750,000 had been spent and the rest is yet to be spent in the coming years.

Tim moved on to the Bridge Repair and Maintenance spreadsheet and reviewed each line through years 2023 thru 2028.

Tim finished with the Highway Equipment Repair and Replacement plan spreadsheet, reviewing each line from 2022 thru to 2032.

The Chair said he would be in touch with Tim to work on the comment section of the spreadsheets and anything else that will need adjustment.

UNAPPROVED MINUTES

III. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. Housing Discussion - Master Plan – Discussion with Matt Monahan (Warner Circuit Rider) and Mike Tardiff (CNHRPC)

The Chair introduced Mike Tardiff, the Executive Director of the Central New Hampshire Regional Planning Commission and Matt Monahan, Warner Circuit Rider (joining the meeting via Zoom).

The Chair further explained he had asked Mike and Matt to join the discussion regarding housing. Further explaining they had discussed the warrant article and the proposal to have a separate housing committee. Specifically, to talk to us about approaches we could take and what assistance is available.

James Gaffney expressed an interest in exploring what other plans are available and his concerns of unexpected consequences.

Mike Tardiff offered background information, stating he was the chair for the toolbox subcommittee for the nine regional planning commissions working on regional housing needs assessments. Explaining this subcommittee looks at available tools and how they can be better clarified and used.

Mike continued observing it had been 11 years since Warner had done a Master Plan. Explaining a Master Plan provides a transparent process to gauge issues pertinent to each town. Typically, the first conversation is about how much the Master Plan will cost. Highlighting the need for town meetings and exploring the “right” opportunities, citing specific examples. Mike has reviewed Warner’s Master Plan and reported there were things that could be refreshed beyond the housing. Citing the core of the Master Plan division chapter, land use chapter and the other chapters that lead to housing. Mike advised this could lead to the 2024 town meeting, observing that change takes time, most likely it would take 15 years. Adding a very involved and transparent public process is needed.

Mike advised if the Board wanted to go in the direction of applying for Investment New Hampshire. Further defining the assistance available from the Regional Planning Commission as well as working and being funded under that program. Making note if that was the direction the Board wanted to go.

James asked Lois Shea to investigate if COVID funds could be used for this. Lois responded she didn’t know. She asked Mike the reason for using the Invest New Hampshire Program? Mike responded to James explaining that he believed housing would receive 100% funding from Invest New Hampshire, but COVID dollars might not be a fit for housing. James asked Lois to ask about COVID funds to which Lois responded they would.

James asked Mike about “strings’ attached to the Invest New Hampshire funding citing the recent experience with the funding used for the groundwater protection. Mike responded that ultimately it would either pass or not pass at town meeting.

UNAPPROVED MINUTES

Mike further explained that The Master Plan itself is an advisory document supportive of zoning changes. The strings are - you're talking about housing - it's almost kind of, one per one, a pretty good use of that type of dollars for a project like this.

James reiterated his concern for unforeseen strings and conditions of the funding.

Mike explained how he helped put the application together to address housing issues, and that they are limited to that. Adding there are other things in the regulations process, but the town is restricted by using the funds solely for housing.

The Chair advised this is a program where the source of funds is our state and local fiscal recovery funds, so-called SLFRF <https://fundingtoolkit.sji.gov/draft-funding-opportunities/grant-funding>. The Chair further explained that this is extremely flexible funding for the state and the state has chosen to use a portion of this for this purpose. To provide its communities with grants to do planning/zoning work related to housing. The program is structured with three different sub programs. The first part is the master plan. So if we were to, if the town were to apply for phase one for master planning work the scope would be written to do that work with no further obligation for regulatory change just the master plan. Phase two is a regulatory audit which the town can choose to do or not. This would be something we'd want to look at now; to determine the conflicts between the Master Plan and the regulations or between different types of regulations. The town has to see if they're inconsistent with each other and resolve those differences. The third phase is actually developing the regulations. So you would develop a scope of work under each of those phases. The last phase to develop the regulations to propose for adoption at town meeting - zoning ordinances. Although, if you're talking about zoning ordinances at town meeting and the town says no, that's it.

James explained the reason he is asking these questions is because in the last 10 years we had bomb after bomb after bomb that's been dropped at town meeting which caused lots of arguably unnecessary division in this town. I am trying to approach this from the perspective of stability and to think twice before making a decision.

The Chair invited Matt and Mike to talk about the whole public process in order to try to prevent division within the town.

Mike suggested approaches such as starting with a survey, then a series of public sessions. Going out and meet with other groups, talk about what the changes have been typically within the last ten years. Determine what are the demographic pressures and changes that are going on. All those powers hitting older demands on different types of housing and how that's switched up. Talk to whoever wants to participate and finding ways to do that in any way you can. That's honestly the way you get to the town meeting too. Once you get to that phase and make sure people aren't surprised. It takes a lot longer and whether you can get 80 people in the room. You probably can't, so go to 8 meetings of 10 people and talk about those things and make sure that all the issues are out there. Make sure that it's not just public posting of a couple meetings.

James expressed his observation of a large contingency of most populations just want to be left alone. They're busy enough with their lives trying to hold a job, pay the bills and take care of their kids and their critters. Let's recognize that this public process is frequently a burden that a lot of people don't want. So I think it would be prudent for this

UNAPPROVED MINUTES

body to pick and choose very carefully what we want to move forward with the public process. Does that make sense?

The Chair replied, yes, he thinks the key is to find a way of involving those folks who want to be left alone in a way that is least intrusive and least burdensome. The Chair noted Matt wanted to say something.

Matt Monahan gave examples of balancing groups for success of the public process relating his experience with other towns. Defining the need to think about trying to make it something inviting, manageable, less of a burden. Rather than the Board seeing a need and attempting to implement it without providing necessary information and answering questions and concerns of towns' people. For example: we've got this idea let's get it going then the public hearings and then it goes to town meeting. Matt further offered the idea of "front loading" a lot of public feedback first, balancing out concerns and finding common ground and all those other things that the public process reveals then go into writing stuff. The public process, no matter what you're doing...pick an ordinance 20 years in the future, hopefully that planning board does the same thing. The more you can do the better it is in the end. The more people are familiar with it, they see their point of view in the ordinance and it's just the best way to deal with complex issues.

Mike reminded the Board it's your process so it's however you want it. The Regional Planning Commission view themselves as an extension of your staff to help you with however you want us to, we're ready to jump in.

Andy related his experience with the difficulty of getting the public engaged. He gave an example of bringing donuts and coffee to various town meetings to help with a major change to their community and it seemed to work. Andy also asked when the deadline for the application for funding was.

Mike answered Andy's application timeline question, saying his understanding on the timing is that this is fine tuning for the first phase. Who knows what spins off from that. Maybe we don't need the audit because we know what we have. Maybe there is a different approach and cluster. The dollars are available now, those other applications could happen, if it's not tied to the meeting.

Don added his belief of perseverance, steadfast love for your community and the general overall well-being of the community. Adding his belief the Warner Planning Board has always a desire to do the best they can with the community or what the community needs. We've been very fortunate - we've made mistakes, a lot of mistakes, but we have muddled our way through. The thing we see today is a lot of us questioning; are we ready...is this town ready for a change? He said, for us old timers change is very difficult. To communicate change to the newer generation you have to have something that is appealing and right now Warner is just stagnant, and it has been for a long time. Our growth record has been slow, developments have been slow. He thinks today we are faced with a tremendous number of issues and as time goes on it becomes worse because we have such a turnover in town government. He would like to take it slow and easy and not jump into anything because we've done that, and it hurts. It needs to be thought out a little bit more rationally.

UNAPPROVED MINUTES

The Chair thanked Don and went on to say he thought that was great advice and he thought Don was right. It really comes from love of community. If we're talking about looking at the Master Plan that's a slow start.

James expressed he felt one of the most important first steps is for us to go through the whole master plan and try to set the priority for each section they feel needs to be updated and go from there. How many years have they been discussing the Use Table? Just to clean it up and not necessarily make substantive changes. If that's not the number one priority, then he would be shocked.

Matt responded that defining the Use Table is huge. There's one town, for example, that has in a district a residential use as a use. What does that mean? Does that mean single family, does it mean duplex, does it mean multifamily...what does that mean? James was just mentioning definitions are important too. What is the description of residential...what does it mean? Then you have these other areas where you've got to play this interpretation game. Where you're interpreting; does residential mean multifamily in this area? Often what happens is, consistency becomes a challenge.

Matt continued to say, then there's the third category of "well maybe we need to put this in." One example...discussions about private helipads came up in another community. It's what they had as an accessory to a private contractor - a private helipad. So there are the ones that are clear; the ones that you have to interpret; and the ones that you think you may need to put in place. The Table of Use is important and I think that would be a good place to start.

Karen Coyne responded to Matt's example as a town reacting and implementing a use rather than being proactive and investigating the best long-term response. Matt offered another example of a town's usage regarding gardens as an example of reaction rather than problem solving.

Lois asked what the typical time Master Plan's are updated and reviewed. Mike responded that 10 years is typical, or a little longer.

Andy spoke of the time he tried to define all the terms that were referenced in the Use Table and was told it was too many to do in one year. Expressing the confusion and frustration even using the Planners' Dictionary. But we've got a lot of things here that aren't defined. And if that's not enough confusion, the legislature this past year passed a new bill and gave us no definition to go along with the terms. So, we're struggling in terms of trying to clean up what we have to clean up.

Matt responded stating, clarity is key. You raise so many good points. If you don't know a definition, how is an applicant supposed to know. He clarified the Andy was talking about the red APA Zoning Dictionary. The average citizen or developer are probably not going to go there so that's why it helps to incorporate those definitions in the zoning when you can.

The Chair asked the Board to get back to the Master Plan. Asking Matt and Mike if they could prepare a short proposal of what the plan would be so we know investing in these funds would be helpful to update the housing chapters.

UNAPPROVED MINUTES

Mike Tardiff stated we could lay something out. It's the model these days to do these over two-or-three town meeting cycles. He could actually lay out how to get going on the division process and the land use and also some of the things that feed into it.

The Chair replied that would be helpful. The point of this would be here's the investment funds and this is what those funds would pay for. If there are other things that they want to do then they would have to pay for it and figure out what it's going to cost. Whether they want to put forward an article for town meeting to say for instance, \$10,000 to do the division and land use and the portion of the demographics chapter. They may optimally decide to do nothing, that's their decision. There is a lot of work involved, there are Table Uses that are the end product and sometime in 2025.

Matt responded, at the very least. He said some towns have talked about piecemealing it. Some towns take three town meeting cycles. In other towns they just go big, leaving some items clear, some murky and just go big with all of it. He said there are a couple of ways to handle that too. Because you don't want to get some of it approved and not others.

James stated he felt the Use Table could be addressed in a non-controversial way.

Andy observed the needs already expressed suggesting going ahead with the process before trying to get into a full audit. Mike responded that there's time for that. The process is to make sure to get a handle on the way you want to proceed.

The Chair reminded the board of the timing for the application to the grant program stating the application deadline was January 27th. Further explaining the applications are on a rolling basis and approvals are on a rolling basis up to that deadline. That's the last day an application can be filed for the master plan work. The other two phases come later. We can apply for those two now, but we're just talking about the master plan.

James expressed concern about the undefined scope of work needed for the Master Plan and the timing involved. The Chair responded by saying this work is more accurate because these guys have done this work over and over. James said he did not agree with this approach. His concern was the Board applies for "x" amount of money, then what is the period of time they have to execute the use of that money?

The Chair responded it would be a lot more time than would be needed. The funds have to be fully expended by September 30, 2024.

James further commented, well if we're going to do a chapter of the Master Plan then, yeah. But if they are going to consider the entire master plan, then there isn't a part of the master plan that couldn't be touched.

The Chair reminded James that these funds can only be used for housing. James concurred.

The Chair asked Mike Tardiff if he had a direction? Mike responded that he did, confirming they will do just the housing chapter. Also, what really makes the basis of a master plan and then those other chapters could happen and maybe talk about it in next year's CIP.

The Chair asked if there were any last questions for Mike and Matt? There were none. The Chair thanked Mike and Matt saying the Board would see them again in a few weeks.

UNAPPROVED MINUTES

B. Rules of Procedure

The Chair said he didn't think the Board would be talking about rules and procedures tonight. He sent Janice the most recent changed document he had. Janice said she would work in Andy's edits and issue the document at the next meeting.

VI. COMMUNICATIONS

Janice said next month Alice Chamberlin and Mike Tardiff are coming in for ground water conversation. Also, Janice commented she would like to be involved in the Use Table conversation. The public ask questions about it constantly and people struggle with it. The Chair responded yes to Janice and asked if there was any further business.

Andy noted that communications was on the agenda. Further adding that the Board had gotten communications from Janice on planning the training. Janice responded she had emailed links on the annual training in Manchester, in November. The Chair confirmed it was the Municipal Association's Annual Conference on the 15th and 16th of November. It's really good if you can find the time to go to it. It's more than planning information it's for all municipal staff.

Andy noted that the other training is for communications. Planning for media actions coming up on the 10th of November. These are pretty good, they actually go through the topic and in the slides they give contacts and a lot of references.

Don expressed his concern for the job stresses related to Tim's job, suggesting it may be necessary to offer him help. The Chair asked if that help should be in additional staff? Don replied that he was unsure but did feel strongly some help was needed to reduce Tim's stress and job demands. The Chair agreed that Tim has way too much on his shoulders. Andy agreed suggesting that perhaps staffing right now would help and the Board would discuss it again in November.

IX. ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned at 9:11 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,

Marilyn Priest
Recording Secretary
Town of Warner