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**MINUTES OF THE
PLANNING BOARD AND MASTER PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE
MEETING OF
FEBRUARY 19, 2025**

A joint meeting of the Planning Board and the Master Plan Steering Committee was held on February 19, 2025, in the Media Center at Salem High School.

PRESENT Joseph Feole, Chair; Sean Lewis, Vice Chair; Bianca Carlson; Jim Harvey; Damon Norcross, Secretary; Michael Banks; Chuck Saba; Paul Pelletier, Town Council Rep.; Brian Flanagan; Bonnie Wright; Carla Billingham

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance. Mr. Feole went over the agenda. Jacob LaFontaine, Planning Director, was also present.

1. Call to order

2. Draft Plan Overview (30 minutes)

- Process

- Vision & Guiding Principles

- Plan Pillars: Gathering Spaces, Town Connectors, Mixed Use Core & Missing Middle Edges

- Development Vision Focus Areas: Historic Town Center & Depot Village

- Implementation Approach

3. Planning Board Comment & Discussion (45 minutes)

4. Next Steps: Public Comment Period & Adoption (15 minutes)

5. Public Comment - Opportunity for the public to provide feedback on the Draft Plan.

Zoey Muller was present she has been the project manager. She is a senior urban planner. There has been another member reviewing the content behind the scenes.

She said the Town staff the Steering committee have been instrumental to shaping the plan this far.

She said they have been working on this for just over a year. There were 2 areas of public input, the first was centered around visioning work. This was to understand people's goals and aspirations. They looked at things they loved and things that they wanted to change over the next 20 years. The second round of engagement was the fall into the winter and that focused on getting feedback on the draft plan.

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1 They have had robust engagement among different platforms. They had the Steering Committee
2 meetings, public workshops, library and Town Hall, public surveys, envisioning comment cards,
3 Towns website, Town Hall Times, Facebook, podcast and community TV.
4 She shared tally's for public participation in each outreach event.
5 One of the early insights was reading the Town from a land use perspective. And understanding
6 the connector streets. That was both a strength and tension for the plan. Main Street stood out as
7 the core connector in the Town. This should be emphasized in future planning work.
8 Infrastructure and environmental perspectives were another piece of the puzzle.
9 She showed a map of areas that can grow and that have sewer access. They have the wetland
10 buffer and are areas that could develop at a higher density. Those areas are Depot Village,
11 Tuscan Village, Civic Center, Historic Town Center and North Salem Historic Town Center.
12 They focused on these areas and connecting with the other parts of Salem.
13 The things they saw that people wanted was a development balance. This is sidewalk connectors,
14 and recreation for families. There is a clear development interest.
15 The Plan is structured around 4 pillars. Each of them represents an engagement theme that came
16 through. Gathering places and Town connectors had the most comments. The mixed-use core
17 and the missing middle edges are also an important factor. Those are talking more about
18 development and housing. They are all interlocked with one another. These are areas where the
19 Town can focus its energy. Historic Town Center and Depot Village have been identified as
20 gathering spaces. The mixed-use core is focused on expanding and building on Depot Village
21 overlay. The missing middle edges focuses on how to provide a broader range of housing
22 options.
23 Gathering spaces:
24 Historic Town centers have some major inspiration areas. The focus is how we can use strategic
25 changes to programmatic activation. They want to bring people here. They think this could
26 activate. There are intersection improvements that could help the area. They are looking at linked
27 pathways in the area. She suggested to connect with the Spicket River.
28 Depot Village is the second area of focus. There is a Depot Village Master Plan that is already
29 underway. She suggested the completion of the rail trail.
30 There was a lot of interest in expanding parks and open spaces. Depot Village and the Historic
31 Town Center have a role to play in that. She suggested to expand on the success of the Ingram
32 Senior Center and include all ages. Families and Youth are an audience that need attention.
33 Investing in historic preservation is important. This showcases the history.
34 Town Connectors:
35 This starts with the rail trail. It is also about connecting the rail trail to the neighborhoods. They
36 identified important crossings. They have specific suggestions on connecting out the rail trail to
37 core areas and making it more pedestrian accessible. The idea is to connect everything.
38 Sidewalks were the most mentioned thing from the beginning. She suggested that the streets
39 should accommodate cars, walkers, strollers and wheelchairs. This would be implementing a
40 complete street plan and updating the sidewalk master plan.

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1 She also suggested parking off of the rail trail. Enhancing transit service was another important
2 point.

3 Mixed Use Core:

4 This is to encourage mixed use development in the Depot area. They will need to refine the
5 height and density requirements that are not enabling this now. They need to change the
6 requirements on use mix. They worked hard on zoning framework for this area that supports
7 those needs. Workforce housing is needed and seniors aging in place. They should focus that
8 development in the areas of the Town that can support it. They are directing the development to
9 the correct areas. They want public infrastructure to be tied to development. There is a desire to
10 have them be linked. They should build on the businesses that are already in place.

11 Missing Middle Edges:

12 This takes the expanding of the Depot Village overlay and takes it to the next level. They should
13 make sure there is diverse housing. The need to be a variety of housing types and also price
14 points. She suggests fine tuning work force housing. They should enable smaller scale units.
15 Mult units or Adu. Take advantage of state level housing.

16 Board Comments:

17 Mr. Harvey asked about why the AMI was based off of Lawrence Massachusetts.

18 Mr. LaFontaine said this is the area that we are located in and that is done by the department of
19 housing. He said that is the designation they are in. It is typically linked to the nearest city. He
20 said there are big differences in taxes in Massachusetts and New Hampshire and he questions
21 how appropriate that is here.

22 Mr. LaFontaine said it is what the regional economy is tied into. He said it is federal decision.

23 Mr. Pelletier said he has an update from the Depot Village Advisory Committee if they want to
24 hear it.

25 He said the Town has received \$140,000 in donations that money is put aside for the veterans
26 plaza. They will be doing landscaping, and new flags. They also have plantings. There will also
27 be a plaque for the founder and originator of the plaza. More funds will be coming in for statutes
28 and walkways.

29 He also said there is a wide-open space near the water tower. He said the word Salem could be
30 printed on the Tower and thinks that it could be a focal point.

31 Chairman Feole told him he should present this to the Council and have them vote on it to get it
32 into the budget.

33 Mr. Norcross asked what the loudest things that residents were looking for or they did not want.

34 Zoey said the first thing they mentioned was sidewalks. This was relative to connectivity in the
35 core area. She said there was alot of interest in recreation. She said she groups them into quality-
36 of-life areas. She said they came through a lot from the beginning.

37 She said there was alot of concern and push back on property taxes. There was concern about
38 development impacts. She said there is some tension there.

39 Mr. LaFontaine said there was consensus that the Town wants a vibrant town center. He said
40 there was a strong demand for that and sidewalks.

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1 Mr. Norcross asked about their feelings on mixed development and 5 stories.

2 Zoey said it is a good starting point. She said one of the barriers is that it is not allowing enough
3 density. She said if the numbers do not work the development will not happen. She said they
4 focused on Broadway and 5 stories would not be out of place. She agrees that it is at the margins
5 of what people are comfortable with. But they have to have the balance.

6 She said they can hear from the Community if they think that it has the balance.

7 Mr. Feole said he thinks about the water and the schools and the resources and asks when Salem
8 is overbuilt.

9 Zoey said they cannot give set numbers because each development is different. They said this is
10 the right place for it. The applicant will have to prove they can support it. She said it will not be
11 over night.

12 Mr. Feole asked if there were no restrictions in the mixed-use area and they could build
13 apartments of any size how would that affect the Master Plan.

14 Zoey said there is sensitivity in that area. She said that is common. She said she thinks they have
15 found a balance. She said there is a massive gap and there is urgency on housing that people
16 need. She said it is always a bit of a gamble to give that freedom.

17 Mr. Harvey said that it is his understanding that it is ultimately zoning changes that will change
18 the future and that the Master Plan is not a legal document just a vision for the future is that
19 accurate. Zoey said yes that is accurate. She said the big picture is that the Master Plan should be
20 consistent with zoning changes. She said it is a steppingstone.

21 Chairman Feole said they have plans to update the ordinances after the Master Plan is complete.

22 Mr. LaFontaine said that is why that is it important to update the Master Plan.

23 Mr. Lewis asked how much public financing was discussed with development.

24 Zoey said the places where public financing shows up are public subsidies. She said it enables a
25 developer to have more access to the funds for workforce housing. She said this is why they
26 added the missing middle edges and that is what they recommend perusing at a state level.

27 Ms. Carlson asked about the mixed use area and the frontage and affordability. She thinks that 80
28 percent of the frontage being commercial will make it very difficult for a developer and thinks
29 they should consider changing that. She said there is also a 1.5 parking space per unit
30 requirement. A lot of these sites do not have parking lots. She does not think that this will be
31 appealing to developers. She also mentioned a picture of a gas station and said it is not realistic
32 that it will be anything other than a gas station for the next 10 years.

33 Zoey said they could look at the 80 percent frontage. She said they were being cautious on
34 Broadway. She said they do suggest relaxing the parking restrictions so the market can be in the
35 driver seat.

36 Mr. Saba said when people go to Tuscan they complain about the parking. Tuscan has more
37 parking than this. He said that the concept of people having one car is ridiculous. He thinks that
38 it is a significant problem. He is also concerned about expanding the sidewalks. He said you
39 cannot just cut lanes out of the street. He does not see how feasible that is.

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1 Mr. LaFontaine said some streets are larger than you might realize. He said there are some streets
2 that do not have any expansion. He said they did have a consultant who looked at the roads.
3 Zoey said there were some spaces that they did determine that was not possible. She said there
4 were places where they could see a real benefit and that would not be too disruptive. She said
5 they are always disruptive to an extent but it would be minimal and there are three locations to
6 focus on.

7 She said one thing you can do to help with parking to have a parking maximum at sites. She said
8 the best thing they can do is to attract the developments. She said market to people who can live
9 with less cars in their life. She said it is not a good fit for everyone. But having the parking will
10 not get you what you are trying to accomplish.

11 Mr. Norcross asked if there was any discussion is home ownership versus rental and if this came
12 up.

13 Zoey said that it did not come up a lot. She said housing is price to meet their needs. She thinks it
14 is important that they have a range. The plan does not specify owner occupied or rental. People
15 need different things at different times in their life. She said there was a lot of discussion about
16 aging in place. She said it means different things for different people. She said they did not hear
17 a lot about and they can monitor it.

18
19 Public Participation:

20 Zoey said the plan is available online and it will be up for a month. The comment period will
21 close on March 19.

22
23 Ms. McLaughlin of 10 Louis Lane was present. She thanked everyone for being a part of the
24 Steering Committee. She thanked them for the opportunity to give public comments. She wanted
25 to focus on the high density area and units. She said it is a wish to keep a small-Town feel. She
26 likes that they have focused development area. She is concerned about the development creeping
27 into the other areas and it will not have the small town anymore. She said the people have
28 spoken. She wants a zoning amendment for a height restriction.

29 Mr. LaFontaine said they do have height restrictions in all districts currently.

30 She also has concerns about the traffic.

31 She is also concerned about the calls for emergency services.

32 There will be more demand on the water and higher taxes.

33 She is asking them to listen to the townspeople.

34 There was discussion to reducing the 80 percent commercial frontage to 35% to 40%.

35 Chairman Feole said they should look at what other communities are doing with mixed use.

36
37 **6. Review of Minutes – December 11, 2024**

38
39 **Motion: Mr. Banks made a motion that the Steering Committee approve the minutes of**
40 **December 11, 2024, as written.**

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Second: This was seconded By [REDACTED]

Vote: 4-0-1

Mr. LaFontaine said there is no statutory requirement that the Master Plan Steering committee needs to endorse the Master Plan. He said if they feel inclined, they can endorse the plan if not they do not need to.

Motion: Ms. Wright made a motion to endorse the Master Plan with the change of the 80 percent commercial frontage requirement.

Second: This was seconded by Ms. Billingham.

Vote: 5-0-0 vote unanimous, motion passed.

7. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 7:40pm.

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Minutes by: Jennifer Hernandez, Planning Board Recording Secretary

Approved: Planning Board

Date: