

TOWN OF ALTON
MASTER PLAN COMMITTEE (MP)
MINUTES OF 2021
JANUARY 27, 2021

APPROVED

Members Present: Paul LaRochelle, Selectmen's Rep.
Kelly Sullivan, Citizen Member
Phil Wittmann, Selectmen's Rep. Alternate

Others Present: Jessica A. Call, Town Planner
Amelia Cate, Planning Secretary

Others Attending Remotely: Bob Regan, Planning Board, Chair
Aimee Terravechia, Citizen Member
Ron Rubbico, Citizen Member
Russ Wilder, Planning Board
Tom Hoopes, Planning Board

Mr. Regan read the remote attendance instructions into the record.

“UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE: To keep our members and staff safe, and to comply with RSA 91-A, the COVID-19 State of Emergency, and the Governor's Orders on restrictions at public gatherings, the Town of Alton is holding "remote audio participation meetings". If you cannot attend remotely, please contact the Planning Department at (603) 875-2162 or planner@alton.nh.gov for further instructions. To remotely attend the meeting, visit our website: www.alton.nh.gov for telephone access and Zoom access instructions listed under News and Announcements on the home page the day of the meeting. If you are having difficulties accessing the remote meeting, please call (603) 507-1002.

**As a reminder, at the Master Plan Committee's October 7, 2020, meeting, the Committee voted to temporarily suspend in-person public attendance. If the public has any comments on anything discussed at the meeting, they can email their comments to the Planning Department at planner@alton.nh.gov, or mail them to: Town of Alton Master Plan Committee, PO Box 659, Alton, NH 03809.”*

Roll Call Attendance

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. +/-

The Committee reviewed the RFP schedule. The RFP was released on January 15th, the last day for consultants to submit questions was February 1st, the deadline to answer questions was February 8th, the submission deadline was February 15th, late February was to review submissions, early March to select submissions and schedule interviews. Ms. Call noted that she received some questions from potential consultants and thought that the Committee could go through them so they were ready for the February 8th deadline.

1. Did the Town prepare the 2005 Master Plan in-house or was it with a planning consultant?
-The latest update of the Master Plan actually took place in 2007. The Plan was written by the Town and some subcommittees, but was ultimately edited by the Lakes Region Planning Commission.

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2. Does the Town envision the inclusion of water, wastewater, and stormwater in this upcoming effort?
-Yes to all three.
3. Are you able to disclose what budget has been approved for this RFP?
-A Warrant Article to raise \$25,000 for a Master Plan Consultant to assist the town on how to proceed with the update, how to get the community involved, and to identify appropriate demographics, among other things, was approved by the townspeople at the 2020 town vote.
4. In the Proposed Scope of Services, could you please clarify the scope of work for “Task 5. Finalization Process”? The last sentence references the ‘finalized Master Plan,’ but it is not clear if the consultant is being asked to draft the Master Plan. The Purpose of the RFP states that this engagement is not to write a new Master Plan. Who will be drafting the Master Plan?
-The Finalization Process includes a draft outline of the Master Plan, not the actual final product. That last sentence in #5. Finalization Process should have referenced a finalized “draft outline of the” Master Plan.
-The goal of this Committee is to get as much public participation as possible with its subcommittees in the hopes that some, or most, of the Master Plan could be written by its members along with the Town. It all depends on the extent of public participation.
5. As a follow up question, could you please clarify what will be the final product of this engagement?
-See question #4.
6. Do you have a grant or budget allocated for this work? If so, could you share the grant or budget amount?
-See question #3.
7. In Item 8 under Proposal Format section, could you clarify what you mean by billing options?
-Billing options refers to an hourly rate.

Ms. Call noted that if she received any further questions, she would be sure to let the Committee know.

The Committee discussed the possibility of having to ask for more funds to get the Plan written, and maybe applying for some grants. Mr. Rubbico stated that his concerns at the beginning of this Committee noted that they may not get the best bidders if they were not clear with what they wanted. He suggested that Ms. Call reach out to the consultants that decided not to submit a proposal to see why they chose not to.

The Committee then discussed the warrant article that was submitted to prohibit the town from spending further money to update the current Master Plan and to just use the current document. The Selectmen did not see how this warrant article would pass because according to RSA, the townspeople could not direct the Planning Board when they updated their plan. It was pointed out that there was one person who signed the petition twice, and that Virgil MacDonald signed it as well. It was questioned if Mr. MacDonald had to step down from all future Master Plan discussions. Ms. Call stated, yes, that he should recuse himself from all discussions. He signed the warrant article and had shown that he had some bias towards the update. Mr. Regan stated that the intention of this update was not to change the character of the town, but rather make sure that the Committee worked towards preserving it. Mr. Rubbico thought that the group of people that signed the petition should become involved so they could understand better the need for the update. Ms. Call thought that someone from the Committee should attend the deliberative session on February 2nd to help educate those who might not understand why an update was needed.

The Committee reviewed the Vision section of the 2007 Master Plan. Each member ranked each paragraph either with an “Okay”, “Discuss”, and “No longer relevant”. The goal of this exercise was for the Committee to identify areas that they thought were appropriate in the Plan, or areas that needed further development, and focusing on the nature of the content and not necessarily the wording itself. The paragraphs in the Vision section were numbered for ease of review as follows:

1. Alton’s original Master Plan was developed in 1965 by the planning board, town officials, selectmen and an outside consulting firm. The report was an accumulation of monthly studies obtained through the cooperation of department heads and residents from each of the five village district areas in the town of Alton: Alton Village, Alton Bay, West Alton, East Alton and the islands. Since then, the town has held a charrette, community forums, and distributed surveys in 1985, 1989, 1990, 1997, and again in 2005 in an effort to update the master plan. Many of the original goals have been accomplished; some remain and are still relevant today. The results of the 2005 community survey (see Vision Chapter - Appendix: A) form the basis for updating community goals and exploring opportunities to revitalize and enhance Alton.

The Committee did not have any issues with this paragraph, but thought the latest efforts should be included.

2. The Master Plan is a living document that serves to direct and guide the development of the town and to be the foundation for local regulations and zoning ordinances. The intended results of implementing this plan are to preserve and enhance the unique quality of life and culture in Alton. This Master Plan is the cumulative expression of a series of citizens’ surveys and community planning sessions. Each section of this Master Plan shall be consistent with the others in its implementation of the Vision Section.

Mrs. Sullivan, Mr. Hoopes, and Mr. LaRochelle did not have any issues with this paragraph. Mr. Hoopes pointed out that “living” should be defined better as “growing with

the town's needs or changes". Mrs. Terravechia thought that the wording was sort of vague. She thought that the intention of why this Plan was being implemented should be stated, and she thought that through this update the goals would be made clearer.

3. Alton desires to grow within the capabilities of the town's resources in a manner that is in harmony with its natural environment and provision of municipal services. The purpose of this Vision Chapter is to foster practices that will promote the wishes of the citizens of Alton and to prepare the town for future growth. The town desires to plan for reasonable growth and yet preserve its "small town rural New England atmosphere." The residents of Alton value the lakes and the mountains as tremendous assets to its recreational and economic base as well as to the scenic beauty of the area.

Mr. Regan thought that additional stakeholders like business owners and town employees should be included because it mentioned only residents.

4. Alton, once a sleepy small town, is on the move. The town is home to many working families who enjoy the diversity of its landscape, its rural character, and value the advantages of raising a family in a safe and friendly community. The town includes long established families as well as a growing number of highly educated, upwardly mobile individuals that desire to work from home or take advantage of its convenient central location within the state (see Appendix A). The town is also home to many older residents who move to Alton to retire, many of whom convert their summer camps to year-round homes. Alton's reasonable tax rate, small town environment, and good school system offer many desirable benefits to its residents and, as such, Alton is a magnet for development opportunities.

The Committee did not have any issues with this paragraph.

5. Alton is limited by topography and geography; Lake Winnepesaukee not only separates East Alton from West Alton, but also separates the Town from communities to the north. The hills and the Merrymeeting River that confine the area between Alton Bay and Alton Village severely restrict the area to be developed and force development to be located along the existing roads.

Mr. Hoopes thought that this should be emphasized because the town really was limited by topography and geography. Routes 28 North and 11 South had limited access by the State. Some people were not aware of these factors and the needed to be made aware that. He also pointed out that the shoreland protection was in effect around the whole strip going up the Merrymeeting River. Mrs. Terravechia thought that the ecology should be taken into consideration like watershed management.

6. The following section elaborates on the community vision by providing a list of goals, a brief explanation, and guiding principles that will aid the implementation of each goal.

This paragraph did not need any further explanation.

7. Currently, the Rural Zones are so permissive that there is no adequate way to achieve the goal of maintaining “the rural atmosphere” or “small town” feeling because almost everything is permitted in the Rural Zone. By having several zones that gradually grade from least rural (most fragmented lands) to most rural (unfragmented lands), the town can retain a gradation of uses that taper from most developed to least developed.

Mr. Wilder agreed that the Rural Zone was wide open, and even today, with a Special Exception property owners could get approval on most anything. He did not necessarily agree with gradation between zones. The value of the land needed to be looked at, for instance, if a piece of property qualified for conservation, it should just be a hard stop. Mr. Regan thought that the conservation areas needed to be identified in town since 2005. Mr. Wilder stated that there was mapping created in 2020 that was adopted by NH Fish & Game Wildlife Action Plan, and the Conservation Commission had that, and he thought that information could be included in the update. Mr. Hoopes stated that he was the one who proposed the idea of gradation because it would graduate the property based upon the quality of roads that served the area, the distance that the land was from any kind of road. Eighty percent (80%) of the town was either Rural or Residential Rural, and that Rural Zone was served by dirt and gravel roads, tracks, and some paved roads, but not all of them were usable for any scaled development, and some sections in the Residential Zone were more than two (2) or three (3) miles away from any road, and that was more Rural. Also, uses like a gravel pit were allowed in the Rural Zone, which butted up against the Lakeshore Residential Zone, so there should be some changes made.

8. Alton’s vision is to preserve open spaces, natural vistas and rural images. It also envisions keeping construction/subdivision development set back, out of sight on characteristically rural roads. Typical roadside strip development will be avoided, while a more rural character of development will be encouraged.

The Committee felt that they had already talked about these items earlier in the discussion.

9. The rural designation should apply to land that is unfragmented (has little or no improved road access) and has little access. At present the Rural Zone comprises most of the landmass in Alton and permits uses that are incompatible with the existing area. In these rural areas, many types of commercial uses are inappropriate.

The Committee did not have any issues with this paragraph, and suggested that maybe some of the prior paragraphs would be retooled and maybe combined somehow.

10. Rural areas with more developed road access, should be designated as new zones with permitted uses that are more compatible in/or near village districts.

Mr. Wilder asked if the Committee should be talking about promoting more dense development in the village districts surrounded by more open space. He talked about encouraging mixed uses like a retail store or shop on the first floor for businesses that were needed in the community, and that had an apartment up above. Mr. Hoopes stated that the intent of this was to foster mixed zoning at the major intersections, for example where Drew Hill Road met Route 28 or where Route 28A stemmed from Route 28 in east Alton, and other places in town where the crossroads where. The Alternative Housing Committee was brought up, and this issue may come into plan during discussions at those meetings.

11. We should consider new regulations that encourage open space subdivisions such as Conservation Design Subdivisions for residential neighborhoods; a type of cluster zoning that could be incorporated as an overlay district for these refined rural zones.

The Committee felt that they had already talked about these items earlier in the discussion.

12. Alton should include zoning standards that encourage development of tourist- related businesses, such as restaurants, small shops, recreational sporting goods rentals, and lodging establishments.

The Committee felt that they had already talked about these items earlier in the discussion.

13. Alton has played a significant role in the history of Lakes Region tourism. To a decreasing degree the town continues to play a role. A handful of small to medium size hospitality businesses continue to support tourism. Overall, however, Alton's neighbors on Lake Winnepesaukee play the significant role.

Mr. Wilder asked if the town wanted to compete with the more developed towns, or did the town want to stay more rural, quiet, and distinctly different. It was noted that Alton had a unique set of characteristics that they should not stray too far away from. Mr. Hoopes noted that in 1968 when the work first started with Master Planning and Zoning, the existing waterfront lodges and commercial uses were grandfathered, but were banned in the future, therefore, there was no way to start a hotel, motel, or restaurant. Mr. Regan pointed out that during the All in for Alton profile, it was shown that those types of services were needed. This would help alleviate the fact that Alton was a drive through bedroom community. Making allowances for Airbnbs was also brought up.

14. Lodging establishments, located on the Winnepesaukee waterfront, were built prior to the exclusionary lakeshore residential zoning that is now in place which only allows single-family homes to be built along the lakeshore. The present zoning ordinances should be modified to allow for moderate expansion of these “grandfathered” establishments to help alleviate the present shortage of rooms in Alton.

The Committee thought that this should be addressed. Mr. Wilder stated that stormwater runoff needed to be watched closely. Discussions took place about the potential of revitalizing downtown, which the Selectmen had also talked about during their meetings, but the biggest issue was the lack of a town wastewater system, plus there really was not much land available. Mr. Hoopes brought up the fact that a prior planner, Ken McWilliams, did a tremendous amount of research for the town for a public sewer system.

15. Resort facilities could provide four-season recreational activities such as hiking, cross-country skiing and snowmobiling on the town’s existing trail network. They could also provide excellent views of the lake and surrounding mountains.

The Committee felt that they had already talked about these items earlier in the discussion.

16. Following the examples established by the Downtown Revitalization Committee, which is working towards building a park, and the Beach Committee, which is working on establishing a new town beach, committees can perform studies as the town’s needs change due to population and growth to determine whether current facilities and infrastructure are able to effectively serve the citizens.

The Committee felt that they had already talked about these items earlier in the discussion.

17. When examining future facilities’ needs, technology should also be examined. The town should improve upon the existing technology infrastructure, improving to modern communications and information systems standards. Updating computers, software, web presence and interdepartmental communications within town government will improve communication with the citizens of Alton. Web based communications between the various town departments and the community at large should be a high priority and every effort should be made to keep technologies updated.

Mr. Regan thought that technology should be emphasized because this affected the general quality of life in town and it things are very different from 10 years ago. A lot more companies have been working from home over the last year, and some will probably stay that way.

- 17A. Goal 4: As the community grows, issues of septic and sewage need to be addressed carefully in the Village and Bay area with periodic review.

The Committee felt that they had already talked about this earlier in the discussion.

- 17B. Goal 5: Alton should continue to expand its recreational facilities and programs in a cost efficient manner.

The Committee thought that during the update process that some things may come to light on this issue. Mrs. Sullivan noted that the current Plan had a lot of crossover with the more recent All in for Alton profile. The need for a recreational facility was highly emphasized during that profile.

18. The town of Alton has made significant improvements to its public recreational areas to increase recreational opportunities for children. In 1990, Alton upgraded the public swim dock at Alton Bay from a small platform to a large octagonal platform. At Liberty Park, the town reconstructed existing tennis courts and added a new basketball court, a skateboard park and a sand volleyball court. Several upgrades to Jones Field were also completed including the addition of new playground equipment, "Little Fenway", a practice soccer field, a softball field and a batting cage. The town's green spaces are being further expanded with the construction of the Alton B & M Railroad Park which will provide a walking path from Depot Street to Ginny Douglas Park, a children's play area, an educational wetland, and areas for picnicking, barbecuing, badminton, and music concerts.

The Committee felt that this should be addressed.

19. Although several upgrades have been made over the last 15 years, there is a need for additional outdoor recreational space. According to the Parks and Recreation Department, the town's current athletic fields are overcrowded. Frequently, our town uses New Durham's fields for soccer, baseball and softball activities. The town needs to increase its athletic field space to support current youth and adult athletic programs and anticipated growth.

Mr. Regan noted that he was not sure how many people utilized the fields at the high school. Mr. Wilder pointed out that there was an area down by Liberty Park near the fire station. He also thought that these parks should be available and that housing opportunities should be local to those facilities. Mr. LaRochelle also noted that there was Jones Field. Mrs. Sullivan thought it would be helpful to have a listing of all of the recreational areas throughout the town. The Committee felt that this needed to be discussed further. Mr. LaRochelle stressed that people should not forget the fact that Alton, and the whole state of New Hampshire, had a natural playground. Mrs. Sullivan stated that as a parent, there were not any areas that parents could let their kids just go and play.

20. The results of the 2005 community survey emphasized the need for additional green space for outdoor recreational activities. For example, the requests for bike paths and running/walking paths were repeated in the surveys. It is recommended that the town acquire lands contiguous to our existing parks for further expansion of the town's "green space corridor." Currently, the town's green spaces lie in a belt that stretch from the fields and playgrounds of Alton Central School, through Liberty Park, on to Mill Pond, to the trails leading to Jones Field, and on to Levy Park, ultimately reaching the town's recreation properties at Alton Bay. To fulfill the vision of a walking/bike path, it is recommended that the town stitch together these green spaces by acquiring additional land or the rights to use non- public land that currently separate the existing green spaces. Future green space corridor expansion specifically to promote less pedestrian and bicycle traffic on the highways should be considered to connect other schools and new recreation areas to the town centers. The need for revising the zoning permitted uses under "outdoor recreation" to include other types of outdoor recreation uses to meet this vision is reiterated here.

Mr. Regan shared that some of the people involved in All in for Alton did some clean up on the loop trail where the ball field was about a year and a half ago. Mr. Wilder noted that the last sentence about revising the permitted uses under "outdoor recreation" was actually on as a warrant article this year as a zoning amendment.

21. Alton desires to acquire additional public beach space. The results of the 2005 community survey reiterated the community's desire for a new town beach. A committee for this purpose has been formed and is actively seeking lakefront property with adequate parking space.

It was noted that the town currently owned three (3) town beaches, Roberts Cove, Echo Point, Hills Pond at the end of Blueberry Lane, and one at Riley Road at the Alton/Gilford town line. Mr. LaRochelle thought that the only beach that had town property was Echo Point and the others had deeded rights-of-way. Mr. Rubbico thought that there could be an opportunity for the whole bay area to become more walkable and more of a community gathering and recreation area and integrate the beach and swimming dock. Mr. Wilder noted that last year the Selectmen tried to present a warrant article to expand the docks but it was voted down. Mr. LaRochelle share that there was a potential for it to be brought up again next year at another location, but things were not finalized. He also indicated that Alton has lost the ability to have any seaplanes to land in the bay, and if the docks were expanded, that could open up the door for seaplanes rides and give them the opportunity to dock safely with assurance. There was an issue for having a spot for a seaplane to dock because the State owned the lake and the Town owned some of the area.

22. Further, the permitted zoning uses of "Public Recreation" need to be changed to allow parks, ball fields and a town beach in Lakeshore Residential and Rural Residential Zones.

The Committee felt that they had already talked about this earlier in the discussion.

The Committee scheduled their next meetings for February 10th and February 24, 2021.

**Mr. Hoopes MOVED to approve the minutes of October 7, 2020, as presented.
Mr. Wilder seconded the motion.**

The Chair called for a roll call vote:

Kelly Sullivan, Aye; Paul LaRochelle, Aye; Ron Rubbico, Aye; Tom Hoopes, Aye; Russ Wilder, Aye; Aimee Terravechia, Aye; Bob Regan, Aye.

The other sets of minutes were in process.

Mr. Regan asked the Committee for their final thoughts.

Mrs. Sullivan thought that the Committee went over a lot of material and there was a lot to discuss. She was looking forward to it.

Mr. Wittmann stated that he was impressed listening in on the conversation. He stated that Ms. Call had given him some information about past Master Plans and he was impressed with that as well. He thought that the town could build up on those. He told the Committee that he appreciated the fact that they let him sit in.

Mr. LaRochelle stated that the Committee had touched upon a lot tonight and that it appeared that everyone understood what was involved and encouraged everyone to not let it overwhelm them. He shared that he had a better understanding of everything going through the list the way they did.

Mr. Rubbico learned a lot tonight and that that it was a useful exercise.

Mr. Hoopes thought that this was a learning process for all of us. He asked Ms. Call if there was anything that she wanted from the Committee or that she needed them to do. Mrs. Sullivan thought that she would email them if she did. Ms. Call stated that she did not have anything specific right now.

Mr. Wilder liked the way the Committee was going about things.

Mrs. Terravechia was excited to be going through the Plan and to start working on the new one. She was excited to for what this meant for the future of Alton.

Mr. Regan felt that the Committee was making some headway. He thought that being able to

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come up with some major headings like Economic Development, Housing, and Infrastructure was helping them see how things were coming together. He thought that the Committee could continue going through the Vision section at the next meeting. Mr. Wilder wondered if the consultant could come up with the potential changes from outside forces that would come to bear on the town, which was important for the townspeople to be aware of.

**At 8:00 p.m. +/- Mr. Wilder MOVED to adjourn the meeting.
Mrs. Sullivan seconded the motion.**

Respectfully submitted,

Jessica A. Call
Town Planner

Minutes approved as amended: April 29, 2021