

**Meeting Notes**  
**“Spotlighting the Master Plan Chapters”**  
***Housing***  
***Energy & Sustainability***  
5.28.14

The following notes represent the comments obtained during the open comment period of the meeting. A copy of the May 28<sup>th</sup> presentation may be found on the Master Plan website:

<http://www.cityofnewburyport.com/master-plan-steering-committee>

Comments related to Housing

- In addition to exploring gray water systems in residential homes, rainwater collection systems/rain barrels should be added to Goal 5.
- Q: How close are we to achieving 10% affordability? A: We are around 7.3%. This percentage has been decreasing over the past few years due to increased residential growth.
- With the plans to establish a 40R “Smart Growth” district near the train station, there will be more housing – likely apartments – in this area, which will create a village center in this neighborhood. The Planning Office would like to see housing and commercial uses near the traffic circle and to encourage transit oriented development (TOD).
- Q: Are there incentives to redevelop current housing into affordable housing? A: Currently, no. We are noticing a lot of single-family homes and rental units converting to condos. To help curb this, the Housing Subcommittee has been discussing potential incentives to offer through zoning that will encourage a developer to provide affordable rental units in return for possibly dimensional and/or parking relief. This process would likely be through a Special Permit. The Subcommittee will include an action item relating to this in the Master Plan and will also explore its possibility through the zoning rewrite process.
- An action item mentioned sidewalk construction in subdivisions for pedestrian safety, but there was no mention of cyclists’ safety. RESPONSE: Cycling was not meant to be overlooked in the plan and when crafting the action items, the subcommittee used the

term “pedestrian” to mean anyone not in a motorized vehicle. However, this is definitely confusing and will be corrected to include the safety of cyclists in addition to pedestrians.

- Q: What are the income limits for affordable housing in Newburyport? A: Newburyport is located in the “Boston-Cambridge-Quincy Metro Area.” The Area Median Income (AMI) for this area is listed at \$94,100. For a family of four in Newburyport to be eligible to purchase or rent an affordable unit, at 80% AMI (a minimum level of affordability), the family must make no more than \$67,750 annually. Many in the affordable housing profession like to see deeper affordability, closer to 50% AMI. At this level of affordability, a family of four in Newburyport may only make \$47,050 annually.
- Q: How do condominium fees factor into affordability? A: Sometimes the fees are less for affordable units than for the market rate ones. Sometimes the fees are identical, but the sale price is lower. Often this is a negotiating point for a developer of the affordable unit and the City/State as the units are being constructed.
- Q: How will the residential build-out analysis be conducted? A: We will look at the remaining available land in the City and its zoning and determine how many house lots may be built by-right. We will also consider potential limiting factors like wetlands, roadways, and public facilities and infrastructure. Also, when the rezoning project is further underway, we will look at some of the proposed zoning changes and determine if/how they will affect residential build-out. We will be working on a commercial build-out analysis as well.
- Q: Does the Affordable Housing Trust own units? A: The Trust does not own units. It assists owners of affordable condos with their resales. The Trust does not market affordable rental units, but will refer individuals interested in affordable apartments to the Newburyport Housing Authority.
- Q: Land in other neighboring communities is cheaper than land in Newburyport. Why can't we work regionally and put our funding where it can “go further” and construct affordable housing there? A: The State requires that all communities have a diverse housing stock that includes 10% of all housing units restricted as affordable. The

legislation prevents any one community in the Commonwealth from opting out of providing its share of affordable homes.

- Development negatively impacts biodiversity. What can we do to ensure that we do not hurt the local flora and fauna? A: We want to promote cluster subdivisions that create parcels that are smaller and closer together, which allows for the backlands to be preserved, giving the local wildlife a place to live and also accommodating human growth. These developments are also more cost effective in terms of constructing the infrastructure needed to support the homes and also providing City services to them.
- Through the Master Plan process and the zoning revision project, I would like to see Auxiliary Dwelling Units (AUD's), whether in the home or in detached structures, considered as a way to diversify the housing stock and to allow families to care for aging parents or to allow children to move home but still have a sense of independence.  
RESPONSE: Both the Master Plan and the zoning revision will examine our current accessory apartment ordinance. We will explore the idea of allowing these units to house family and possibly non-family members.
- Several neighborhoods have homes that were once corner stores. Can the use of these structures be changed back to commercial/retail? A: Changing the use back to commercial is possible, but it is not allowed by-right, there is a permitting process involved. Market forces may dictate whether or not a property is more valuable as residential or as commercial. If a corner store can be supported and be a financially viable option for an owner, he/she may apply for a use variance to convert the residential structure to a commercial one.

#### Comments related to Energy & Sustainability

- Please consider adding an action item relative to car idling and legislation to address idling. Perhaps establish idle-free zones in certain areas.
- Can the City create reserved, or even free, parking spaces for hybrid vehicles in much the same way there are reserved spaces for compact cars? Reserved parking in the

public lots may provide incentives to individuals when they are considering whether to buy a traditional vehicle or purchase a hybrid.

- In the public lots, there should be charging stations for hybrid/electric vehicles as well as solar canopies that will not only provide renewable energy and but shaded parking.
- Q: Do issues of invasive species belong in this section or in the Natural Resources section? A: Invasive species and biodiversity are found in the Energy & Sustainability chapter. While the presentation did not address invasive species, this topic will be addressed more thoroughly in the action items listed in the plan. Biodiversity may also be included in the Natural Resources chapter as well.
- Sustainability isn't just about being environmentally responsible; it is also an economic driver. When we shop locally, grow our food locally and produce goods locally, this is economically more efficient, a money saver for local residents and a way to grow the local economy. Sustainability should be a part of the economic development chapter as well.
- Regarding waste management, it is a savings to the local tax payer to recycle and reuse waste rather than pay to dispose of it. Recycling should be discussed in terms of money and the benefit of the savings to the community.
- Education and the schools should be a part of the sustainability discussion and not just in terms of making the school facilities more sustainable, but including the students whether through community gardens, recycling programs or curriculum.
- Q: Who manages the pesticide use on public land? A: The Board of Health has a role in pesticide use. In terms of where to include this topic in the master plan, it could fit in Public Facilities & Service, Energy & Sustainability, or Natural Resources.

#### Miscellaneous Comments

- In addition to a lot of the topic areas complementing each other and there being a lot of overlap in ideas and goals, there are also a lot of contradictions among the various actions – solar panels on homes vs. historic preservation; allowing density vs. historic character of neighborhoods. A lot of the actions seem to indicate a pro-development

agenda. How do you mediate conflicting goals? A: We can apply standards to new development versus existing development. Also, each neighborhood has its own character and feel. We don't want to encourage development in areas that are already high density, we want new development to happen in neighborhoods that accommodate more growth and places where new growth is appropriate in size, scale and massing and will not negatively impact the surrounding area.

- There seem to be a lot of "For Sale" signs in the Business Park. Will zoning changes significantly impact what can happen in this area? A: The zoning revision project is at its early stages, so we're not sure exactly what amendments we would bring forward for Council consideration. The business park has a lot of wet areas so allowing horizontal expansion may not be the best option. Allowing vertical expansion is more practical. We will conduct focus group interviews to determine how to make the parcels in the park more viable so that businesses want to locate there and want to stay there long term.