

## **Town Plan Steering Committee 11/13/21 Meeting Notes**

KL: Kent Lew  
DG: Don Gagnon  
DS: Dick Spenser  
CL: Carol Lew  
PM: Peter Matson  
SM: Susan Matson  
DC: Don Campbell  
JG: Josh Greene

All here, missing four

JG to circulate notes, DG and KL to decide whether JG's notes stand as a record for the meeting

Last Meeting:

Sectioned out roughly three zones of concentration:

Housing, specifically accessory dwelling units, short-term rentals, affordable housing

Carol's write up for the Tracks gives a focus as to why short-term rentals are a potential generator of revenue

Also asking BRPC to help with a Housing Needs Assessment

We did not fit that in with BRPC discussion, KL will be reaching out, we have the grant, just a matter of finding someone to put on that job

DS: How much of a HNA is regional and how much is specific to WA?

KL: It would be a WA study. I had meant to send a sample, the one from the county is still in draft; the Great Barrington (GB) HNA has a bunch of comments in it, a working copy. The report has a standard format.

DS: With so few residents and an aging population, it's more of a regional thing.

KL: We commission it, then we have them come to us and say, here's what we're going to do, this is the scope of work, we say, great, can you also do this to add to it or build on it as a phase II. Primarily Data driven. We can add to it.

DS: If we were to build a senior housing facility, that would draw from all over the region.

KL: The HNA provides data to confirm or modify our assumptions, it provides that underpinning. As with any assessment of data, patterns emerge that won't necessarily surprise us, but will add perspective. We can ask to compare our town to our region and our county.

As we look at short-term rentals, we should look at what issues have come up and not go too far in that direction.

SM: In the city, with Airbnb's, people would buy apartments; too many people would do that and then suddenly you would have a bunch of strangers on your hall.

KL: We need to establish what do we want to guard against. GB has planners, they are in a better position to utilize the data. Where does an accessories dwelling bylaw work into our town plan.

DS: It should include an assessment of what these recommendations would do to tax

rates.

KL: Our efforts have been to address financial sustainability, to build a tax base that makes this place more affordable for people already living here. This should be expense neutral or build in enough gain to offset costs in a relatively short period of time. If we want to encourage a certain type of short-term rental that isn't now allowed, we would have to change our zoning. I'm not sure our town lends itself to the Tanglewood market. There is very little available in the Hilltowns, and yet we are positioned to provide housing to support those cultural activities.

DG: Housing Assessment is a good tool for what we are doing.

Another bullet: Talking about commercial: lodging, office space, dining. A separate opportunity to think about that as a project.

And, communications, that initial essay Carol wants to put out, a great idea, sets the stage for why we're here. It explains how we get money; it's very helpful. We're boxed in and we're limited. So, what are our opportunities. These are the things that have jumped out. That's going into the Tracks; what would be the next thing?

CL: My thought was not so much the next one. But how we go about producing these. Josh and I have been working together on this. We would propose a four-person panel. And we would cover a range of topics: The character of our town, understanding gov't. Over the course of 12 months we have 12 articles that are a mix of those things. Could be things about money issues in advance of town meetings. Or in summer, the hiking trails. That doesn't help so much if we are trying to bring in people, but it does help people understand the town.

Figure out the layout, 8.5 x 11 both sides, \$35 a month, I would donate a little toward it. I feel there's a great value in it. As town members get educated and feel more connected and understand the issues we face, to help the people who will be in a room voting. The articles are something people will look forward to; we can use the website to strengthen the communications.

The panel would be the ones to decide, not have to get approval, to make sure they get the right input first, then run it by KL, DG and DS.

JG: We would propose that we submit text to KL, DG and DS to put the committee on notice, so the text is open to comment, and would move forward if there were no immediate response.

DS: I suspect the finance committee would be willing to support it.

KL Community engagement best practices grant, primarily for building the website. If, once we take care of the big pieces, there is still some funding, I could make sure this is justifiable under that rubric and peel off a couple hundred dollars.

CL: Allison was interested in joining the editorial group but doesn't think she will have the time. My proposal would be to include DC, SM, me and JG. My hope would be that we can meet and look at a schedule of articles.

KL: I think of it as an editorial board, then assign it down. It's the overview process. I would suggest that there be a 12-month plan with general topics. Circulate that to the steering group then take it away and decide.

JG: Since things are likely to change over the course of the coming months, I would suggest we plan for three months at a time.

CL: When we got the input on the first post, after we passed that around, there were important things added. KL would know the gov't schedule.

KL We say great, go ahead and do it. The draft is circulated FYI, if you want to kibitz a bit. That meets with what is appropriate without bogging down the process.

Community education. We might discuss a social media or other communications tool that might not be under the purview of this group. This group is about those education articles, to have a plan of articles going forward that are keyed into town planning.

Accumulate a bunch of ideas, sketch them out, then focus on the first three months.

DG: Community Education Editorial Panel, that just sounds so juicy. Should we make a motion.

KL: I will make a motion to establish a Community Education Editorial Panel, to direct the activities and articles for the coming year, within various media. The members of the panel would include CL, DC, SM, JG.

PM: I second the motion

DG: Steering committee votes: all Ayes.

KL Our first official action.

CL: The four of us will check our schedules this week.

DG: In terms of the BRPC grant, we need to finalize two more actions.

KL: The deliverable is an outline of the next three months and the time frame is December 1.

CL: And there will be the first article submitted to the Tracks.

DG: The next thing would be to do something similar in terms of housing. We would need the Housing Assessment to have the tool.

KL: The other aspect of the housing arm was to go further in the development of an Accessible Dwelling bylaw. The AARP overview gives a good perspective on this: some

of their points are doable, some more pertinent or not. What is the next step to chew on that, to shape what aspects are most beneficial to our community.

CL: Would the deliverable be that we are trying to go to the Planning Board with a bylaw change.

KL: The Planning Board would form the Bylaw, we could give a draft.

DG: We would come up with the idea, do some legwork about what the bylaw might look like; if there is another town with a bylaw, we could review that. If we put it in writing, that would be best; then the planning board would go to work on it. We would work with BRPC.

SM: There's a way forward on page 15: Creating and understanding the zoning code.

DS: The group just has to deliver bullet points to the Planning Board, this is what we think we want, this is what we think we can already do, this is what needs to change.

DG: Through BRPC, we get edits, I want to do this, the town wants to do this, then we would look to see what could be done. It takes time, you want to get someone at BRPC involved. Then the board starts to wrestle with it. Then you argue about it for a while and you write up the bylaw. They you take it to a public hearing, people look at the bylaw, if they have comments that make sense, and we make changes, then it goes to a five-member board.

KL: Needs to move out of the Planning Board to the Select Board to put it before the town meeting. The town body has to vote by two-thirds to make a change.

DG: At a special town meeting, the town can push back and make amendments.

SM: With these Accessible Dwelling Units (ADU), what's so complicated?

KL: Our steering community needs to give the bylaw some shape. We're interested in allowing these things for these reasons and to guard against these things. It's not our job to figure out what the bylaw will say.

JG: We need a points person just as Carol has been the point on the communications plan.

SM: I'll be the points person.

KL: We should take this up as a formal initiative, to come up with a one-page request of the planning board, what we think they should address, why, and what other shaping criteria we might suggest. The main thing is the purpose: Seniors aging in place opportunities, short term rental opportunities, tie that to the kind of ADU that are enabled—garage units, detached units—what is acceptable for our town? Maybe

there's some aspect that people might not want to see. Give the planning board a strong starting point.

DG: One thing that needs to be addressed: Check with the board of health as to what is needed in terms of water and sewer. If you add another rest room and your septic was not designed for it...

KL: There are aspects of contemplating ADU that go beyond the changing of the bylaw: Where does it bump up against Board of Health? To do some of that homework, what other groups would need to be brought in. Along with that could be some short-term rental bylaw. Part of this initiative would be to chew on this ADU document.

DG: Way back in the early 1970s, I was going to college in Westfield and working in Pittsfield; rented a house from Helen Flynn in Becket. She owned this house and rented it in the summer for big money, and she rented out a small cottage behind the house. If a family builds a tiny house and then the need for the ADU for the family goes away, that ADU would now be a rental.

CL: It's just repurposed.

KL: Are there additional aspects of the zoning bylaw to put restrictions on how these are being used. If the intention is to provide more long-term housing, once we have a bylaw that allows these to be built, are there additional restrictions to make sure they don't get out of hand.

CL: If we look into what is happening in other communities, and keep that in mind. Here in Washington, we're all so far apart.

KL: But there are places, like along Route 8, where you see many more houses right next to each other.

PM: Why not say that for the ADU to be permissible in WA there can only be one such in a building lot.

JG: The Eagle op-ed on short-term rentals in GB mentioned restrictions on the number of people who could be in a unit. They mentioned 11 people renting units, which caused problems for neighbors.

DS: That's the board of health issue: You could have 24 college students renting a four bedroom unit.

KL: What are the regulations in the state: Title 5 Regulations?

DG: You can get those regulations online.

KL: You may find it easier to ask someone: Ed Fahey, our health agent with the BPHA.

SM: I am not capable of reading all that.

KL: We need to formulate questions for the health agent.

DG: Can we ask Tom at BRPC to find out some of these things?

KL: What help is he in the position to provide and how do we line that up with our needs. A lot of that is with the bylaw. Do we need to get this to be covered by the existing DLTA, with an extension into January? He said we have some leeway but not a lot. This group needs, maybe, two meetings to come up with document, at least. Before we go to the planning board.

SM: That seems reasonable to me, two meetings.

KL: There is some research to do.

DS: As many of us are thinking about this, we should funnel questions that need to be answered here through you, Susan.

SM: To think about what we want,

CL: If we run into info about this issue, that should get passed around.

KL: Stockbridge was contemplating dwelling units, I will send that doc out. AARP ADU Model State Act and local ordinance. Gets down into the nitty gritty, will digest that and see if it's worth sharing.

DG: Good plan. Still shaping. We have a housing assessment, and the communication piece.

KL: We have a clear thing around communications, and have identified a time line. With ADU, I'd like to suggest we are prepared to deliver a document to the planning board before the end of the year. Two meetings. Then the planning board would be ready to take this up in January.

DS: They have the hard work to do.

KL: Housing needs, DG and I should get BRPC going right away. The deliverable is maybe a draft. The question is what is the time frame. Hope soon. I think the ADU bylaw proposal does not need the HNA to be in place. We may get that back in January and may digest it and give a few more bits of info to Planning board. We need to clarify that with Tom: Is that time frame viable.

CL: Susan and I met with Rika who has a little house in our town that will, in the future, be an Airbnb. And she has done Airbnb rentals with her now permanent residence. SM

knows other people who do Airbnb and VRBO. This is where we can get 6 percent room tax. Our current bylaw allows it for a home or for a room, and there are some ADUs in existence. So, our thought was to write an essay on short-term rentals, and SM is up for writing up this article, will take some time, and would be expandable on the website. Could be something that helps people understand why they might consider this. We thought we could be a resource for people, a little Airbnb support group. Rika also knows people who do cleaning and prep, so people don't need to do that work if they don't like it.

KL: From the standpoint of building our tax revenue, it's valuable to provide resources to enable short-term rentals, and to outline what's possible. It's a communications effort, part of the expanded website that's providing resources for those considering offering a short-term rental, best practices, things to think about, who to go to.

CL: Rika said part of the problem was that she had to write something up. We could write something about our area, and renters could link to it, or they could write it up for their place.

KL: One other thing that hasn't come up for a lot of discussion. Under the communications group, we are moving forward with the website, everyone providing great input. We have the education aspect going. Something that has been raised before is whether the town should have more social media presence. Whether we should, and to what extent, what it would look like, how we would manage it. E newsletters, revival of our website. [Kent mentions a contact who specializes in this.] Maybe there's a time when she would come and help us think through what would work, and warn us about what is quicksand.

SM: I have a friend in Kinderhook who started an Airbnb; she does pictures [on social media] from the farmers market, pictures from new business that might open up and it is so charming.

KL: There are a number of people who do Washington-centric social media. The Watsons have a feed for their webcams. We could link to these on the website. The question becomes, should we have an official presence as a town?

DS: I happen to be on Facebook, and I have one friend, so I know v little about it. I get emails because I have an account; every so often something interesting pops up, and then I log in to read it.

DC: Been on Facebook for years, took forever to get my brother Peter on. You have to pick and choose, use filters, I sell stuff on there, it's a good way for people to communicate and find things. Without being there, I wouldn't have known about [certain things going on]. It would make more sense for the town to allow for links, rather than to have an account.

KL: For people thinking of coming to WA, people don't know about it, people don't know

we exist. But for those who have taken the trouble to seek us out, to have our website help people to get to know us better, having links to people with social media accounts about Washington.

Don: If we have a sign at the town park, Frank Kennedy used to manage it. Now it's broken and gets wet. Jane Petco was handling it but had a knee operation and may not be doing it.

KL: Will have to check if CivicPlus allows a feed for a Washington hashtag. Anne Marie had a lot of interest in marketing and promoting Washington.

DS: Allison is very interested in that as well.

KL: They will have ideas about how to leverage what exists and coordinate it. Expose groups and make them known. If that becomes a place where residents are connecting.

DS: There are groups, a listing of local social media accounts of interest.

DG: Next meeting? The 20th to talk about ADUs. And then the 11th of December. DG will put these two dates out on an email.

KL: I will draft two graphs for Tracks from Select Board, about how Town planning is happening, here are the things we are working on now.

DG: We must be done.

KL: Motion to adjourn. All in favor: Unanimous.