

**Town of Freetown
Master Plan Committee**

Minutes of the Tuesday, November 28, 2023 Meeting
Held hybrid at the Police Station Community Room, 15 Memorial Drive, and Zoom

Present in Person: Nicolas Velozo, Trevor Matthews, David Crose and Charles Sullivan.

Present over Zoom: Keith Mello.

Absent: None.

Call to Order: Trevor Matthews called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

Note: As this meeting was conducted as a hybrid and a member participated remotely, all votes taken were by roll call.

Minutes

Mr. Crose made a recommendation to send the minutes to the board right after they have been completed, so they are fresh in memory to be able to approve.

A motion was made by David Crose, seconded by Nicolas Velozo, to approve the 08.08.2023 meeting minutes. The motion carried 4-1; Charles Sullivan abstained.

Update on Master Plan and Next Steps by SRPEDD

Philip Hu from Southeastern Regional Planning & Economic Development District (SRPEDD) gave a presentation on updates for the Master Plan and the next steps. He explained that the attendance at open house was weaker than they would have liked but he encouraged Master Plan Committee members and others to attend the public events. The timeline moving forward is to move deeper into the detail phase and to get a final report by the end of 2024. Engagement within the community had happened at different town events. Kick off was at open house last month, turnout was low, but great input happened. Mr. Velozo asked how many people had attended. Mr. Hu stated that only four people attended. He suggested for a weekend date to hopefully get more engagement. He went over the engagement to-date. He explained that there had been 274 responses from the online survey, but not all questions had been answered. He reviewed the demographics of the survey and the survey summary. Mr. Velozo gave testament to first meeting and why residents like Freetown; they want to keep the small-town feeling. Mr. Hu gave detail on how to balance the small town feel and economic development, with what residents want to see. He explained that there is a need for community space and better public spaces. He went over the strengths of Freetown being open space, quality of life, residential, and schools. He explained the residents' concerns being lack of local shopping, lack of services, and train station. He discussed the future changes to be more parks, trails, town centers and pedestrian paths. Mr. Crose commented that he was surprised that protecting open space is high on the list because we have a lot protected. Victoria Alfaro shared that about 800 acres is protected under Conservation Commission. Mr. Hu added that because it is a survey, not all information was presented, and could be the reason for protection of open space being the priority. Mr. Matthews commented that baseball fields are awesome but they have to be driven to, to access them. Survey had results of percentages for land use, housing, and economic development. 48% of respondents wanted to prioritize new 55+ housing. 65% wanted to see new services like restaurants, while 62% want to see new businesses in the center of town. 52% are concerned that someone they know will not be able to afford living in town. Mr. Velozo asked if there is an age group of respondents that answered the concern about being able to afford to live in town. Mr. Hu responded that mainly the older community raised that concern. Mr. Hu went over transportation, services and facilities. Residents expressed the want for more sidewalks, particularly connecting neighbors to Assonet Four Corners. Residents are skeptical on water and sewer development due to cost and more future development. They want updated facilities, such as Council on Aging, library and Town Hall. He further explained that residents want to protect open space. For example, Long Pond area, band stand, water access, trails and playgrounds. Mr. Velozo asked if the committee is able to view the results themselves. Mr. Hu will share with the committee, a survey monkey link and excel sheet with data. Mr. Hu went over the business owners' section of the survey. Twenty-two business owners had responded.

Mr. Hu gave a summary on the survey. The key takeaways were that it confirmed main insights and to balance growth while preserving the small-town feeling. The survey showed that younger generations want

more change, while long-time residents are more cautious. Mr. Velozo stated that there was a want for more activity. He asked, with reference to other towns, what activities are more favorable over others. Mr. Hu stated that the activity would be more businesses and services. The message to send is to ask what residents would like the town centers to look like. Mr. Crose made a comment about how residents do not want sewer and water but do want more businesses. Mr. Hu added that more information would need to be presented to get more understanding for residents to answer questions. Mr. Matthews added concern about Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) communities and how the state will sue if we do not comply. It seems to be the message that the state administration is sending to get more compliance. Mr. Sullivan suggested to focus more on different lot sizes for different areas; it could be the way of keeping the small-town feel but can still open up land that would not change the character of the town. The committee discussed briefly about accessory apartments.

Mr. Crose inquired if people could take the survey multiple times. Mr. Hu assured that people are only able to take the survey once due to it records IP address when the survey was taken the first time. Mr. Crose suggested to add the survey on the signs around town and on the main page of the Town website. Mrs. Alfaro suggested a shorter survey so that residents would put more thoughtful input and to finish the entire survey. Maria Jones from SRPEDD suggested to share the interactive map with residents to get more feedback. Pharmacy and grocery store were suggested at the open house. Mr. Sullivan stated that a pharmacy was looking at a spot on South Main Street but there was no stop light. Mr. Mello stated that South Main Street, in 10 years, will not look the same as it does today.

Mr. Hu presented what the next steps would be. Travelling workshops are planned at the Council on Aging bingo lunch for December 12th. There is also a middle school civics lesson planned for 2024 to do an activity with middle schoolers. Ms. Jones is also working to coordinate more travel workshops. Mr. Hu suggested PTO, Cultural on Council, and Long Pond Association (LPA). Mr. Velozo made it aware that LPA is more Lakeville so that would not be as beneficial. He suggested to maybe stand outside a gas station entrance or at a popular entrance around town. Ms. Jones stated to do a night at Profile Tavern or at the Transfer Station and to be scheduled monthly. Mr. Matthews suggested The Ledge restaurant in Assonet.

Mr. Hu went over the topic-based deep dives and working sessions. They are more detailed sessions with presentations and analyses and encourage the public to attend. First session would be scheduled for early February to identify potential development. Second one would be for April and then mid-May. They would cover required topics of a Master Plan. Mr. Hu asked if the committee would have any questions on land use, housing or economic development that they could help with. Mr. Velozo shared that he thinks the zoning, where they are placed currently, is a good setup and would not want any change to the zoning in town. The committee discussed the thoughts on possibly reducing lot sizes along the major roadways, to not add more infrastructures, in a way to create more housing but not more subdivisions. They would also do a deep dive, in depth zoning analysis and the insights of what could be improved. They would show examples of other success stories in example towns. Mr. Matthews asked about the proposal to this kind of zoning change and the MBTA community's requirements. Mr. Crose replied that those are separate, need by right multi-family housing. Mrs. Alfaro will send out dates for next meeting date. Mr. Hu finished the presentation and would send out survey results to the committee. The committee agreed to promote the interactive map.

Any other business to properly come before the board

Mr. Matthews asked about a new chair member for the committee. Mr. Crose and Mr. Matthews would switch off with each meeting.

Meeting Adjourned

A motion was made by Charles Sullivan, seconded by David Crose, to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 7:16 p.m.

This is a True Record by me.

Attest: _____
Nicole DeMoranville, Senior Clerk