

Westmoreland Planning Board
July 8 , 2024
Westmoreland Town Hall
Approved Minutes

Attending: John Harris, Ian Bresnahan, Alan Bell, April Ferguson, Lisa Prince, Michele Hayward, Liana Capra, Tim Thompson, Lauren Bressett, Alison Fissette, Bruce Smith, Bill McGahie
Excused: Larry Seigel, John Stronk (alt.)

Lauren Bressett called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm.

Lauren Bressett spoke about the "Invest NH" grant. Todd Horner had come to the previous planning board meeting to speak on this opportunity. Some money would be allocated toward the master plan.

Alan Bell said the wording of the grant seems to be promoting housing. He asked if the master plan can use the grant money without promoting housing. Lauren said that housing is a focus. The first round is about assessing the need, the second round of funding would go toward increasing housing. However, the type of assistance that was offered in the former grant regarding assisting in planning and facilitating community information gathering is now just in the form of formal training that someone would need to participate in. She doesn't feel that is what we need. Kristen Riley said that in order to get the grant, there would need to be an expressed interest in increasing housing. Lisa Prince noted that the town is operating off of the current masterplan, which is against housing growth. There was consensus that the grant wouldn't meet our current needs. April Ferguson asked whether SWRPC is trying to have an outside influence on the masterplan. Bruce noted that while there could be some assistance in things such as reviewing the committee's work as part of our membership, SWRPC would charge a fee to do any actual writing of the plan.

Lauren Bressett asked for an update on the next steps the master plan committee has. Alan said the committee is currently aiming to have the survey ready for the November elections so the surveys could be passed out to residents, with the committee crossing them off of the residents list, and mail surveys to those who did not get a survey at the election. There will be a question at the end asking if the survey taker would like to be contacted about attending a focus group.

Lauren noted that while the questions were pretty comprehensive, what would also be helpful is asking questions that reference the different zones in town. This will help delineate where residents think particular activities should be allowed. She asked if there is an educational component to help those taking the survey understand some of the terms and concepts in order to answer the questions accurately. John Harris noted that adding an educational component could lengthen the survey. A role the planning board could take would be to educate. After meeting with Cheryl Zajac, they feel that the survey needs to take no more than 15 minutes to fill out, in order to get the most results. Kristen Riley responded, saying that these questions are referencing areas and terms that even the master plan doesn't have a full grasp on. In order to get the best results, the survey taker needs to be informed before answering. She noted the masterplan committee is a subcommittee of the planning board.

Lisa Prince said she would like to have forums before the survey goes out. Kristen Riley agreed. They could learn other topics that the town might find important and could possibly fine tune the questions to get more specific data. Bruce Smith noted that the conservation commission focus groups that had been done helped with the past masterplan survey questions because the committee received data for questions from that.

Alison Fissette also suggested having focus groups on specific topics before the survey goes out. There is no need to rush because the masterplan is well ahead of the game regarding when it is due. April Fergusson said that building in some focus groups first means election time might be too ambitious.

John Harris asked if there are other topics the planning board would like to see in the masterplan. Bruce Smith said, "how is rural defined?". He also said he would like to see a question about solar. Tim Thompson mentioned that small towns are losing population, so the school is at risk of closing, which could kill a town. Tim said there needs to be questions about how to attract young families to live in Westmoreland. Daycare might be an important topic to include. Lauren mentioned that perhaps an info and data gathering table at the PTA's get ready for school night might be a good place to do this. Liana Capra thought a question about residents' thoughts on airbnbs could be useful. Lisa Prince mentioned a question about having retirement homes for elderly residents in Westmoreland. Maybe this would encourage younger people to move into the freed up homes.

The planning board agreed to do some educational pieces on the town website in relation to topics that would be covered in the survey. The masterplan committee agreed to fine tune their survey draft and then both groups would meet to finalize the survey.

Alison Fissette made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Bruce seconded. All voted in favor. The meeting adjourned at 7:03 pm. Recorded by Kristen Riley.