

**Town of Leverett  
Comprehensive Plan Steering Group  
Meeting #1: Meeting Minutes  
April 17, 2023  
7 pm to 8:45 pm**

**Attendees**

**Consultants in attendance:** Emily Innes

**Steering Group members in attendance:** Silas Ball, Matt Boucher, Jenny Daniell, Arlyn Diamond, Jim Field, Gary Gruber, David Henion, Isaiah Robison, Kim Van Wagner, Steve Weiss, Bob Weitzman

**Planning Board members in attendance:** Tim Shores, Tom Ewing, Ken Kahn

**Others in attendance:** Andy Vlock

**Minutes taken by Tim Shores.**

**Resources:**

- Emily's presentation:
  - [https://leverett.ma.us/files/CP\\_Phase\\_2 -  
Steering\\_Group\\_Meeting\\_1\\_Presentation.pdf](https://leverett.ma.us/files/CP_Phase_2_-_Steering_Group_Meeting_1_Presentation.pdf)
- 2020 Leverett Zoning Bylaws:
  - [https://leverett.ma.us/files/2020\\_Leverett\\_Zoning\\_Bylaws.pdf](https://leverett.ma.us/files/2020_Leverett_Zoning_Bylaws.pdf)
  - [https://leverett.ma.us/files/2020\\_Leverett\\_Zoning\\_Bylaws\\_Index.pdf](https://leverett.ma.us/files/2020_Leverett_Zoning_Bylaws_Index.pdf)
- 2005 Leverett Subdivision Rules and Regulations:
  - [https://leverett.ma.us/files/2005\\_revision\\_Subdivision\\_Rules\\_and\\_Regulations.pdf](https://leverett.ma.us/files/2005_revision_Subdivision_Rules_and_Regulations.pdf)
- Other files are available on the Planning Board page:
  - <https://leverett.ma.us/g/58/Planning-Board>
- Comprehensive Planning pages:
  - <https://leverett.ma.us/g/95/Comprehensive-Planning>
  - <https://leverett.ma.us/p/2105/Leverett-Comprehensive-Plan-project-timeline>

Meeting began at 7pm.

## **Minutes**

### 1. Opening remarks

Tom Ewing described the background and goals of this planning project, summarized as follows:

- The Planning Board has been interested in revising Leverett's zoning bylaw to better meet the current and future needs of Leverett and the people who live here. The zoning of a town has significant impacts on how that town changes over time, what it's like to live in that town, and who is able to live in that town. Leverett's current zoning bylaw was written according to ideas and planning efforts in the 1970s and 1980s when a top concern in Leverett was avoiding rapid over-development. Given the work and research required to revise zoning, the Planning Board decided to apply for state grants to fund a comprehensive plan, as defined by Massachusetts General Law.
- The job of the Steering Group will be to learn about the existing conditions of Leverett, the future of Leverett that residents would like to work towards, and to assist with reports written by consultants, including guidance on changes we could make to help us achieve that future -- such as changes to the zoning bylaw, if zoning bylaw changes would be appropriate to achieve that future.
- It will be a lot of work, but Tom believes everyone on Steering will come away with a stronger connection to each other and to the future of Leverett as envisioned by the community.

### 2. Welcome and Introductions.

Emily welcomed everyone and introduced her process. Everyone took turns introducing themselves. Shared themes of introduction were love for Leverett and personal commitment to working in the best interests of the town.

- Andy Vlock is considering joining the SG but is not yet decided.

### 3. Review scope and timeline

- Jenny Daniell asked about the language of 'growth' and 'development', and whether this word choice indicated an assumption being made before inviting the community to provide their vision of Leverett's future. Emily replied that there was no assumption on the consultants' part in terms of what actions that town would take or should take, but that part of the consultants' analysis would be to determine what actions the town could take, given the evidence of existing conditions, if the town chose to do so. That is, given the evidence of matters such as land usage history and patterns, water and soil resources, septic regulations, housing density, demographic change, and other items of interest to Leverett, what future scenarios of growth and development could conditions in Leverett support? What would

the tradeoffs be of each of those scenarios? The consultants present scenarios in terms of development and tradeoffs in order to provide accessible meeting materials for a Community Visioning process.

- Steve Weiss suggested that the timeline is very tight, and seems unrealistic. He asked if there's a reason to try to finish the Steering Group scope of work by October.
- Tim replied:
  - We can be flexible. The Phase 1 grant award had a grant end date that was less than one year after the grant start date. Planning Board applied for the Phase 2 grant assuming it would have a similar duration of less than a year. After winning the Phase 2 grant, we learned that the grant end date was more than a year away.
  - (Tim followed up with Margie after the meeting and learned that the Phase 2 grant end date is the end of June, 2024).
  - Tim also observed that the role of the Steering Group is meant to be independent from Planning Board oversight, and this is by design to ensure a fair process. The Planning Board's role has been to decide the overall goals of the planning project, win grants, define the RFP, select the consultant, appoint Steering Group members, and communicate progress to the town. The Planning Board will also have final approval over the contents of the Comprehensive Plan. But the Steering Group is free to decide its own process (within the constraints of planning defined by MGL Chapter 41 Section 81D, and the overall goals defined by the Planning Board's grant application and RFP).
  - Planning Board members will not attend future SG meetings, except as liaisons when it is supportive to do so. For example, Tim will help with Town Hall access, and will help with posting updates and meetings to the town website.
  - Emily confirmed that the consultants will be able to be flexible about this, as well.
  - Tom observed that an early goal of the Planning Board was to have zoning changes ready to propose by Town Meeting 2024. This is no longer realistic, even given an accelerated timeline, so we shouldn't consider this a need for the accelerated project timeline.
  - Nobody objected to lengthening the Steering Group timeline. The Group will pick this topic back up at future meetings.

#### 4. Discuss format of Community Visioning Groups and identify volunteers.

Emily described two options for Community Visioning Group meetings:

- Option 1:
  - Initial community-wide meeting with consultant team to introduce process
  - People sign up at that meeting for small groups discussions
  - Members of the Steering Group (and other volunteers) facilitate the meetings with materials/instructions from the consultant team and report back
  - Second community-wide meeting to present aggregate results of small group meetings
  - Pros and Cons of Option 1
    - Likely to have the most in-depth conversations
    - Relies on volunteers to step up
    - Discussion/results may vary by facilitation team
  
- Option 2:
  - Community-wide meeting with consultant team to introduce process (including existing conditions) and begin visioning
  - Second community-wide meeting to discuss evolving vision and goals
  - Third community-wide meeting to present recommendations and receive feedback
  - Pros and Cons of Option 2
    - Opportunity for group conversations is limited to the event.
    - Experience may be more consistent for all participants.
    - Less effort required of Steering Group members – facilitation is only required at three events
  - Kim Van Wagner asked if we need to decide on an option at this meeting. Emily said no, but we should try to decide by the May meeting.
  - Discussion: Arlyn Diamond, Kim Van Wagner, Gary Gruber, and Isaiah Robison expressed a preference for Option 1.
  - David Henion and Arlyn suggested gathering input at Town Meeting, along with the printed message (see next agenda item). Tim said that he'd be tabling at Town Meeting with copies of the Phase 1 report and the Comp Plan Logic Model, and would add this to the table.
  - Jim Field suggested that we hold off on deciding between options before we need to. The decision between options remains on the table for meeting #2.

#### 5. Discuss message to Town Meeting (April 29).

- Emily presented her draft letter and invited feedback.
- Arlyn suggested that the first paragraph of the letter should express a strong statement of our commitment to this project. Jenny Daniell agreed. Emily asked for volunteers to write this paragraph -- Jenny and Arlyn volunteered, with no objections from the rest of the Group.

#### 6. Next steps:

- May: Existing conditions and scenarios
  - Per Doodle poll, May 10 at 7pm will likely be the second meeting. Emily will keep the poll open until this Friday, April 21.
  - When the meeting day and time is decided, Tim will send to Town Clerk to reserve Town Hall. There are currently no schedule conflicts on Leverett website calendar.
- June: Continued scenarios (may need second meeting)
  - Per Doodle poll, June 13 (and possible second meeting on June 27) will likely be the third (and fourth) meeting.
  - When decided, Tim will send to Town Clerk to reserve Town Hall. There are currently no schedule conflicts on Leverett website calendar.
- June/July/August: Community Visioning Groups. May extend into September, depending on Steering Group input.

Meeting ended at 8:45 pm.