

Minutes: Steering Group meeting #2, May 10, 2023

7pm to 8:30pm

11 out of 14 in attendance (quorum is 8)

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

Steering Group members not in attendance: Isaiah Robison, Sarah Dolven, Nicole Vadja

Consultants in attendance: Emily Innes (Innes Associates), Tracy Adamski (Tighe & Bond, Inc.), Juliane Ding (RKG Associates), Chris Herlich (RKG Associates)

Planning Board members in attendance: Tim Shores

Minutes taken by Tim Shores

Resources:

- 2020 Leverett Zoning Bylaws:
 - https://leverett.ma.us/files/2020_Leverett_Zoning_Bylaws.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
- 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>

- 1) Meeting began at 7pm
- 2) **Welcome and Introductions:** Since this is the first meeting for consultants from T&B and RKG, everyone took turns introducing themselves.
- 3) **Minutes:** No changes proposed to minutes of April 17 meeting, submitted by Tim Shores. Silas observed that he had not seen the minutes. Gary moved to accept the minutes, Arlyn seconded, the vote to accept the motion was unanimous. Kim said she would help Silas get a printed copy of future minutes.
- 4) **Organizing:**
 - a. **Chairs:** Andrew proposed that the Group vote on two co-chairs, and volunteered to be one of them. Jenny volunteered to be the other. Matt moved, Gary seconded, unanimous vote to accept the motion to appoint Andrew and Jenny as Steering Group co-chairs.

- b. **Clerk:** The group discussed options for taking minutes. Gay asked if Tim would consider acting as SG clerk, taking minutes. Tim said he was willing if nobody objected to having a Planning Board flunkie hanging around. Tim also made several very funny jokes. Everyone approved of the plan with absolute enthusiasm.

5) **Community engagement and outreach plan (CE+O)**

- a. Emily led discussion of the task to review and update CE+O developed by last year's Working Group.
- b. **Community Visioning Meeting format:** Emily framed the primary SG decision as the choice about Community Visioning Meeting format. Based on her experience in other towns and her understanding of what works well in Leverett, she recommends the following three options:
 - i. **Two big community vision meetings** bookending **a series of small meetings** in between; or
 - ii. **Three big meetings** and no others; or
 - iii. **All small meetings.**
- c. **Order of meeting presentation:** A secondary SG decision about CE+O meetings is the order the two meeting topics --
 - i. **First, listening and facilitating discussion of hopes, dreams, and concerns; Second, presenting materials about existing conditions.** Drawback to this order is hoping and dreaming about the unicorn farm and having difficulty letting that dream go.
 - ii. **First, presenting materials about existing conditions; Second, listening and facilitating discussion of hopes, dreams, and concerns.** Drawback to this order is that people become intimidated by the factual details and self-censor.
- d. Lively SG discussion about CE+O:
 - i. Steve: What number of people should we set as CE+O targets?
 - 1. Jenny: +1, and we should also think about setting diversity targets by reaching people from different income brackets, people with children actively in school and those not in that group, those who own and those who rent, and other criteria.
 - ii. Arlyn:
 - 1. People who find it convenient to attend a small gathering will be more likely to attend bigger gatherings, or other small gatherings.
 - 2. If I host a meeting, would the goal be to identify issues of concern? Or to identify ideas for solutions?
 - a. Emily: Yes, and. An advantage of small groups is having the flexibility to tune into the group participants – some will want to focus more on problems, some more on solutions. This flexibility helps people feel more engaged, more included, and that their points of view will be well-represented at the larger meetings and in the plan.

3. Feels disturbed by low response to last year's Working Group survey for Phase 1. We can overcome that with networking among established groups.
 - a. Tim observed that the big problem with Phase 1 survey is that we didn't give people enough time to respond – only 3 weeks. Leverett generally shows up with high response rate to surveys. Recent examples include the Revenue Committee survey, the LifePath Age-Friendly Communities survey.
 - b. Emily: 100 to 200 people would be a good response for Leverett. Consultants will get latest demographic data so we can monitor survey performance by demographic segments and promote diversity. Also, many people who don't want to attend meetings will respond to survey.
 - c. Kim: Reminded about Steve's question about number of people to target. She advocates for a month-long kickoff at the transfer station and other sites to raise awareness and enthusiasm.
- iii. David: Not everyone goes to the transfer station, but a lot of people do. However, some go on Wednesday, some Saturday, some Sunday. A CE+O program sustained for a few weeks would net a lot of residents.
- iv. Gary:
 1. +1 to David's sustained transfer station presence idea.
 2. We want to reach every pocket of Leverett. We should each spend time on CE+O in our own neighborhoods. Silas could focus on Hemenway Road, for example. Andrew can focus on Teawaddle Hill, etc.
- v. Kim:
 1. Advocates for creating a brief form with information and questions that SG members can use for small meetings, helping to standardize the qualitative data we collect. This can also help us avoid the temptation of bringing personal agendas by guiding consistent messaging.
 2. Rattlesnake Gutter Trust plan giveaway is happening soon and would be a great CE+O buzz opportunity.
 3. Based on her union organizing experience, she recommends that everyone on the SG adopt individual performance goals, for example: "I will talk to 145 people by a certain date." They could organize territories to avoid overlap.
- vi. Andrew: Important to think about how we frame and communicate, our word choice, will determine CE+O effectiveness. Being willing to hold casual conversations with people will be just as effective as a mailer.
- vii. Steve:

1. People are less available for this kind of work in summertime.
 2. Important to talk to people about tangible terms and decisions – specific options for infrastructure, commercial zoning, cell phone towers – these are what will attract people to discussions, where they may then contribute to less tangible discussion of vision.
 - a. Emily: +1 and scenario forecasting by consultants will provide a lot of content for this approach. Consultants will need community vision meeting results as part of the data for forecasting.
- viii. Jenny: Expressed concern that some details of existing conditions are beyond the scope of the Comprehensive Plan, but still necessary to obtain before the town can make decisions with lasting impact (such as zoning changes, housing density, number of size of buildable lots). An example is hydrological study to learn the capacity for development that would impact drinking water demand and septic use, as well as update flood zone mapping, and the impacts of Leverett water use for the purposes of climate change preparedness. Would issues where further research is needed become a blocker for the recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan?
1. Emily:
 - a. Yes, the SG and consultants could identify important blockers in the final Plan. Since the work is grant-funded and time-bound, it's inevitable to find topics that we can't address because they lack sufficient on-the-ground study. These can become further-research-is-needed (FRIN) items identified in the final plan.
 - b. But there's a caveat: by state law, the Comprehensive Plan must converge on a set of recommendations that the town government will be able to implement with available resources and without reliance on additional 3rd parties (such as environmental engineers to conduct further hydrological study). Part of the plan, by design, will be to produce a realistic implementation plan that can be executed within the constraints of existing conditions and community vision.
 - c. It will also still be Leverett's plan, and its use will be up to Leverett, according to the town's established democratic processes of decision-making.
 - d. Even without data that reaches 100% confidence, a town can still strike a balance by identifying topics of

concern in which we have *enough* data to make policy changes that help achieve a community vision.

2. Matt and Jim: Leverett does now have a climate preparedness plan, finalized in 2022. Jim will send it to Emily for inclusion in existing conditions data.
- e. Guidance from Emily in response to SG questions and concerns:
 - i. It will help if SG members become familiar with the maps that consultants have developed and will develop in existing conditions analysis. These maps will be a useful tool for communicating effectively with people.
 - ii. The SG can use a variety of small meeting formats: small subgroups of SG members -- as few as 2, and as many as quorum minus 1 (which is 7 people, quorum is 8 now that SG has grown to 14 people) – such as household parties, neighborhood group meetings, transfer station tabling and polling (aka “at the dump” – with appreciations to Jim Field), meeting with affiliation groups (churches, civic organizations, gardening clubs, pickleball players, etc.)
 - iii. Reminder that consultants will provide materials for SG to distribute and use at meetings. Materials will include documents about existing conditions, polling and survey items. Consultants will provide design, digital access, and estimates of printing and mailing costs.
 - iv. An effective way to prepare for a variety of meetings and people is to prepare some material that’s general (about the whole project) and some that is specific to that group (their geography, their identity, their specific concerns or values, etc.).
 - v. Begin by listening to people in the group, supporting their discussion with one another about needs, hopes, and concerns. Then show them materials about existing conditions, and pay attention to how they receive that information, and how it changes the discussion.
 - vi. SG members can recruit planning ambassadors and volunteer meeting facilitators who would like to contribute to making great meetings.
- 6) **Subcommittee formation:**
- a. Arlyn, Kim, and Steve formed a publicity plan subcommittee.
 - b. Jenny and Andrew formed a survey subcommittee.
- 7) **Deliverables:**
- a. **By June 27 meeting:**
 - i. Subcommittees will prepare materials for discussion.
 - ii. SG members should think of survey questions.
 - iii. Consultants will provide sample materials based on Leverett existing conditions analysis for SG to consider using at community vision meetings.

- b. **Longer term CE+O outcome:** SG will work with Emily to develop a consensus statement of community characteristics, vision, and goals, learned by SG members from community vision meetings. This statement is necessary before SG and consultants can begin to address solutions in the form of scenario forecasts.
- 8) Next steps**
- a. Next meeting will be June 27, 7pm at Town Hall. This meeting has already been posted.

Meeting ended at 8:30 pm.