

11/6/2023 Meeting of the Steering Committee for Leverett Comprehensive Plan

In attendance: Jenny Daniell, Andy Vlock, David Henion, Arlyn Diamond, Silas Ball, Gary Gruber, Bob Weitzman, Isaiah Robison, Kimberly VanWagner, Nicole Vajda

From Planning Board: Tom Ewing, Tim Shores (via Zoom)

Not in attendance: Matt Boucher, Jim Field

Meeting Recording:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1eGoiW_JZVG2o5euiLPXjZGmNwV_lalle/

Meeting Start Time: 6:35pm

Meeting End Time: 8:15pm

Intros: everyone shared a thought about the Data Walk event

- More attendance than thought
- Great team effort
- Happy to see strangers
- Surprised by the level of interaction and involvement
- Impressed with consultants
- Beyond expectations
- Tom Ewing - tough to watch by Zoom
- Good movement around the room, enjoyed talking to others
- Impressed with Emily's presentation, lots of info, thoughtful, two thumbs up
- So happy with engagement from lots of people
- Really cool; impressed at how prepared people came

Meeting minutes from 10/10/2023 approved unanimously; noted that tonight's meeting started earlier than 7pm which was listed as the start time agreed upon at the 10/10 meeting.

Co-chairs discussed group values, asked for steering group members to: be careful to treat each other with respect, kindness, patience, transparency, collaboration, respecting all viewpoints; noting that significant differences of opinion can lead to getting "heated" in community events and interactions.

Discussion on the upcoming December 6 event:

Kimberly and Andy met via phone with Emily, who said that the December 6th event could have sample scenarios that people could see. Scenarios would be a forecast of the benefits and costs of a choice the town made based on the community data. Kimberly stated that Emily had suggested that as a group we come up with a few suggestions for scenarios to present on December 6th and that Andy had stated we would explore values and how we could create a decision-making tree.

Preparing for December 6 event:

Generally, people thought it would be difficult to make recommendations to Emily in terms of scenario planning without having completed the questionnaires (open until December 15th) and

without the Data from the Data Walk. Emily had sent some snapshot data from the Data Boards two weeks ago, but that info was not forwarded to the whole group; Andy says he will forward.

- Differing viewpoints and suggestions included:
 - Can we do rough estimates of what we think people will want?
 - Can we modify the date of the next event or extend the deadline Emily needs to write the plan in 2024?
 - Debate about June deadline, the contract with the state, the contract with Emily. Tim verified that, according to Margie McGinnis, the state grant contract specifies an end date at the end of June 2024. Tim will look up the contract terms for clarification.

There was discussion about how much the final comprehensive plan is about zoning as the way the town implements changes and how much the planning group's role is to build and/or uncover a value system of the town into which zoning would fit as one of many tools for change. Zoning sounds dry and technical but actually is an expression of values. Tom explained the usefulness of comprehensive plans to justify actions taken by the town in the future with state-funded dollars.

Our role as Steering Group is to act as a conduit for the data: to give the high level, broad value goals we gather from community to the consultant and to make sure that Emily is on track with deliverables and in keeping with the community values. The way our town is asking Emily to work with us as a group with lots of community input from a variety of sources is a new(er) model of participatory planning and that comes with the need for flexibility and creativity. These conversations around the planning table and with residents have value in and of themselves, and we are creating the process even as we experience it. In addition, this comprehensive plan may not be where everyone's opinion and voice is heard, but if there is overwhelming agreement for something that falls outside the scope of the master plan, we want to be sure to include it in the final plan. That's part of our oversight of Emily, and part of Emily's style is to be flexible with how the plan is written to reflect the community.

We debated whether and for how long to stay "broad" by asking for general input versus narrowing down a little so people can have some decision points. We need to stay open for at least the duration of the survey to capture people's ideas and not cut them off from our own timeline. At the same time, we would be doing a disservice for folks by continuing to ask them to give us all their ideas while knowing those ideas may not be part of the final plan or solvable by this group - so in that way, giving some scenarios is needed to help guide people to begin decision-making and choosing between outcomes.

The group decided to ask Emily if, for the December 6 event, she could allude/teach about the scenarios without specificity; that is, based on the data so far, could we offer folks some "kinds" of the things we may be talking about soon? We want the next event to be a "step forward" - we don't want to present a plan that limits further input but we don't want a complete repeat of the November event or the feeling of stagnation. Let's keep the momentum and build on it, but also start focusing somewhat. If we present the idea that we will be given questions and scenarios in the future; there will be choices and pluses and minuses of other choices; learning about these kinds of choices could be the focus of the next event.

After much debate and discussion, the Steering Group concluded that we cannot come up with scenario suggestions or a decision-making tree and that it is Emily's job to come up with scenarios. However, we will ask Emily to consider showcasing for December 6th work she has done for other towns and to help us think through scenarios. Folks said that some scenarios would be helpful for the December 6th event but not in a way that made people feel their ideas were not going to be included or that this is the final step. At the same time, we need a "hook" or attractive reason for folks to come back out after the November Data Walk, something different.

Question of whether to vote for "Data Walk +" concept, which is almost identical to original data walk with addition of "here are some ways that this data could be used" information.

Unanimous decision to ask Emily to clarify all, make recommendations, and help us understand what is possible.

Small group meetings & Tabling Discussion

Andy, Jenny, Nicole, and Arlyn held a Teawaddle Hill group at Andy's house on Sunday, November 5 at 4pm. Andy fliered Juggler Meadow and Teawaddle mailboxes 5 days in advance. Eight neighbors attended, all from Teawaddle Hill. People brought concerns about taxes and intersections. The group of leaders will combine notes [unclear who took notes] and will send them to Emily. Andy did not have questionnaires on hand but promised to hand deliver them to each attendee.

Tabling at events is different - there isn't time to have real discussions with folks. At the LES Open House, Nicole and Kimberly tabled by the gymnasium/cafeteria entrance. At first, they asked if people were residents of Leverett, but they were unclear if that was leaving out a large voice of people who have a stake in the community. Then they asked if people had filled out the questionnaire yet, and if not, explained what it was for so that people could decide if they needed to fill it out. They also had a volunteer sign up sheet and 5 people signed up. Kimberly and Nicole will follow up with those folks. Also, Nicole had a box with the QR code and a request for kids - What do you like about living in Leverett? What would you change? With post-it notes for answers that people could drop into the box. Kimberly will scan these and send them to Emily.

Gary tabled at the Harvest Fest Village Co-op, which had been postponed to Sunday, November 5th. Gary had posters for people to write thoughts and copies of the survey. The posters will need to be shared with Emily.

Several people, including Gary and Kimberly, have still not received postcards. Tim will contact the vendor, Minuteman Press, to find out what's going on.

Unanimous decision to cancel the meeting for next week and focus on November 20th instead. Tim will alert Lisa to remove public notice.

Minutes taken by Kimberly VanWagner