

**New Marlborough Planning Board
Public Meeting
Saturday November 19, 2016**

Attendees:

Chair: Patricia Hardyman
Members: Mark Carson
James Mullen
Other attendees: Martha Bryan
Lauren Geherty (Berkshire Regional Planning Commission)
Elie Katzman
Barb and Matt Kelly
Ruben Kier
Leslie Miller
Peter and Abbie Steinglass
Jane Tant (secretary)
Robin Tost
Bradford Wagstaff
Stephanie Wain
Tara White (Selectman)

Call to Order: 9:50 am

Ms. Hardyman opened the meeting by greeting attendees and stating the purpose of the meeting was to present and receive comment on the latest update to the Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) for the Town of New Marlborough which the Planning Board has been revising over the last several months. She summarized that an OSRP is a high-level planning document for management of open spaces and outdoor recreational sites within the Town. Since the original New Marlborough OSRP of 1990 was last revised in 2006 and Commonwealth of Massachusetts guidance calls for update after seven years, the New Marlborough Planning Board requested and received a grant of Development Local Technical Assistance funds in 2016 for update of this document. Ms. Hardyman noted a current OSRP is necessary for the Town to be eligible to receive Commonwealth grants for projects to improve outdoor recreation facilities and enhance management of open space. Ms. Hardyman pointed out the revised draft OSRP contains five goals which were provided as a handouts and mounted on five large display boards. She encouraged members to make comments on these goals. She then turned the presentation over to Ms. Geherty of Berkshire Regional Planning Commission.

Ms. Geherty began by providing an overview of the environment in New Marlborough noting that New Marlborough contains five historic villages. She stated this is unique in Berkshire County as other towns possess only one or two historic centers. Mr. Wagstaff responded that this is a key distinction. He expressed the view that the five villages have distinct identities and, therefore, deserved separate planning efforts. Mr. Mullen responded that during formation of the Comprehensive Plan the Planning Board held separate meetings with residents of each of the five villages. However, he felt that a Planning Board composed

exclusively of volunteer members with full-time employment did not have the time or “bandwidth” to plan separately for each village within the Town of New Marlborough. Ms. Geherty suggested coordination with the Selectboard to potentially form village associations to represent the unique identity of each village.

While presenting an overview of the environmental assets in New Marlborough Ms. Geherty highlighted the following:

- A significant number of rare species in areas adjoining wetlands and water sources
- Over 70% of town land is forested
- Approximately 10% of town land is open field which contributes to wildlife diversity
- A high percentage of land is conserved in some way
- The majority of land is privately owned with much of that land owned by senior citizens who might be expected to transfer ownership over the next two decades

Ms. Geherty presented several highlights gleaned from the 123 resident responses to the survey on open space and recreation conducted over the last five months. These included:

- 79% of respondents stated they walk on a daily or weekly basis
- A high number of comments desiring safer walking along country roads
- A significant number of comments desiring improved access to Umpachene Falls Park

Ms. Geherty then referred to the five goals presented in the handouts and on the display boards. Ms. Steinglass called attention to Goal 1, Objective B which advocates zoning change to reduce frontage requirements in the five villages. She asked if such a change would make a village more accessible on foot and conducive to walking. Mr. Mullen agreed that would be a hoped for effect. He further noted that the goal of any zoning change would be to perpetuate historic settlement patterns in the villages and take the pressure of residential development off rural open spaces.

Mr. Steinglass then asked Ms. Geherty if she was aware of any data on how much land in New Marlborough is owned by persons whose residential status precludes them from voting in New Marlborough. Ms. Geherty stated she did not have access to such a metric.

Ms. White noted access to Umpachene Falls Park was curtailed when the wooden bridge on the west end of Umpachene Falls Road was closed abruptly in 2012 after Commonwealth inspectors determined the structure unsafe. She noted the while this bridge is on a Commonwealth priority list for repair, the Selectmen view repair of the Southfield Bridge as a higher priority due to the dependence of emergency services on the latter bridge to reach much of the town. She also pointed out the extensive permitting required to do any work at Umpachene Falls Park due to significant government regulation regarding work along rivers.

Mr. Kier called attention to the lack of light pollution in New Marlborough and stated he believes the Town has a resource in its dark night sky. He recommended the Planning Board consider adding this resource to the OSRP. He noted rural towns across the country are increasingly seeking designation as “dark sky” communities. He recommended the Planning Board research the requirements for earning a “dark sky community” designation and stated he would be willing to support it. Mr. Wagstaff added a “dark sky” designation is an example of something that might be applicable to specific villages but not to the Town of New Marlborough as a whole.

Ms. Hardyman directed attention to the large maps on display and specifically asked for input and comment on the Unique Features Map and the Action Map. Attendees were encouraged to leave their seats for review of the displayed maps. They were asked to draw in any features they thought deserving of identification.

The formal presentation phase of the meeting was concluded at 10:40 am when attendees were requested to provide written input on both the maps and goals displayed on easels at the front of the room.