

MAYOR
JEFFREY A. MACMILLEN

DEPUTY MAYOR
THOMAS ZAMPANO

TOWN MANAGER
MICHAEL P. DOWNES



COUNCIL MEMBERS
BRUCE ABELSON
ROSE MARIE ANGELONI
MARIE E. DIAMOND
WALTER GOAD
VINCENT J. MASE, SR.
NICHOLAS PALLADINO
RONALD PELLICCIA, JR.

TOWN OF NORTH BRANFORD

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Special Meeting Minutes BLUEPRINT COMMITTEE OF NORTH BRANFORD, CONNECTICUT Thursday, September 28, 2023 Smith Library — Northford 7:00 p.m.

Chairman Zampano called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

1. Salute to the Flag

2. Roll Call

Present: Chairman Zampano, Vice Chairman Armin, Member Jennifer Ash, Member Robert Nowak, Member Bruce Abelson, Member Bonnie Symanski, Member Fleming, Member Christopher Heon, Member Melinda Fonda.

Also Present: Town Manager Mike Downes, DPW Director Fran Merola.

Not Present: Mayor Jeff Macmillen Member Steve Torino

3. Approval of Minutes from August 23, 2023

Motion: Vice Chairman Armin motioned to approve the meeting minutes from August 23, 2023; seconded by Member Abelson.

Discussion: None

With all in favor, the motion is passed.

4. New Business: Discussion & Action

a. Create a Mission Statement for project.

Chairman Zampano asked everyone to share why they are a part of this committee so we can build our mission statement for this project.

Chairman Zampano was eager as it is a proponent of creating a central spot for the town “town center”- vision is for a group to come up with a view of what NB could look like. The goal is to make it an essential spot for North Branford and Northford in a general area.

Member Nowak shared that during his time on Planning & Zoning over the last 1.5 years frustrations as to what we want the town to look like. Antiquated regs not updated and updated relative to lighting. There was a study done in 2006 on revitalization of Northford center, creating a traffic circle, improving the dynamic, but nothing ever came of it. One of the ideas was to add sidewalks and to provide more access to the property in the center. Holistic approach and have a long-term objective for the town.

Member Symanski stated she has given a lot of thought to this. One thing stands out is blight at the IGA plaza, big property and doesn't know if there is blight ordinance. She also shares that there is no place to walk in town with a stroller/ walker, etc. That would be a great place on Foxon Rd. for sidewalks or somewhere you can walk, stop for lunch and meet someone for coffee. There were sidewalks put in in East Haven and all of a sudden, the USPS can't deliver the mail due to the sidewalks/ mailbox placement. Thoughtful development and tax incentives could bring in more business to town. The ability to capitalize on the farmland is also very important.

Town Manager Downes echoes what others have shared. There is a lack of cohesion in the aspect of the town with itself. A lot of that has to do with how the local government is made up. The focus should be narrow due to short time frame provided; There is no Blight ordinance, which is absurd. Town Council just repped incentive program that's been in place since 2016 for developing businesses. It freezes taxes where they are and then they can go for 5 yrs. and allows them time to incrementally build to the assessment value. An opportunity to create town center is there to give a Blueprint to the Town Council and help guide them to make things more cohesive.

Member Fleming shares that one thing drove him to get involved is to look at opportunities to expand the pride of North Branford/Northford; how to make this town even better. This can be done by bringing a lot of the recreational activities together can help bring the town together. This could be a big opportunity to attract younger families.

Member Fonda stated that something to consider, is as much as we need to build the tax space, we are not growing economically in the commercial and industrial field. We have to really keep the charm of the farm community. People want to have a town center but keep the farm community. What is the percentage that people come in for tourism to the town, it's something to take a look at. Also, we are short on affordable housing in town. As we star to develop, we need to be careful to meet those criteria too. By giving incentive we can build business stronger, but really where is the traffic coming. If you planning to go out to dinner, are you going someplace in town, or going out of town? If going out of town, how can we change that.

Director of Public Works Merola wanted to share his passion about the town as he has worked for town 29 yrs. He has seen the many plans, for sidewalks down Rt 80, an access road behind D & D and Bobby's Pizza; Use of all of the fields, updates to Northford center. The state wants to do something with the road. It's been discussed, the state can put in sidewalks, but the town owns them and is responsible for the maintenance. When the town had facade grants, they couldn't give the money away. Town Hall is sitting on the most financially profitable spot in town. It could bring in \$80,000 in taxes and the town hall is occupying that space. One of the biggest issues is the government changes and new people get brought in and then plans don't get executed.

Member Abelson shared his kids grew up in this town but don't want to move back for various reasons. This town is doing some great things. This committee started from the Town Council, and someone dropped a bunch of studies on his doorstep, and this is part of how this is formed. We are a farming community always been and always will. We need to embrace

that. It's an older community and everything has a price. We need to be able to attract the younger population.

Member Fonda shared that the average age of community is 47 years old, and we need to attract the younger crowd. That could be a problem if we don't have any volunteers for the fire department/ ambulance and then have to pay a fire department. That is an expense down the road, if we can't attract the young. Right now, the youth want to live in a city where everything is at their fingertips. Looking at the vision, maintain the charming farm community atmosphere, develop center location for town facilities and purpose of town center, and how it is going to better the town. Enhance the town economically that will make it desirable to the young and the old. Those are some key points to add to the mission.

Town Manager Downes stated the focus is to exclusively focus on town owned lands. Member Fonda stated that as part of our mission statement it should be to evaluate what properties can be sold, turn over to land trust and use for land conservation.

Vice Chairman Armin shared some of the things he has heard from other members: Everyone is here to help the town develop a sense of cohesion and have the desire to improve quality of life here. There are many parcels that can be revenue generating. There are many things to help create an identity of the town.

Review town owned properties for development or turned over to the land trust for preservation.

Mission words shared by members: Quality of life, Cohesion, Cultural Center, Sense of Community, Rural identity, Appropriate revenue generating.

Member Heon shared what he wrote which incorporates a lot of the items discussed by other members.

“The mission of the town Blueprint Committee is to create and implement strategic plans that promote the single growth enhancement of our town. We aim to foster a thriving, inclusive community by focusing on economic, social and environmental opportunities that will improve the quality of life for our residents and ensure long term prosperity for our town. Our commitment is to collaborate with local businesses, residents and government entities, to stimulate economic development, attract new investments and support existing business. Through strategic planning, identification of growth areas, and nurturing of entrepreneurship, we will create an environment that fosters job creation and increased economic opportunities. Ultimately improving the towns financial stability and attracting visitors. We place strong emphasis on sustainable development for the long-term reliability of our town, we commit to preserving and enhancing the natural resources our town provides.”

Member Heon will forward this mission statement idea to the committee, and it can be voted on at the next meeting.

Member Fonda and Member Abelson shared an idea that we should ask some of the younger kids to share their thoughts of the town and what they feel would make the town better. It's a good idea to get a roundabout approach of opinions on what the town should be.

b. Review past studies done.

Town Manager Downes shared the Planning & Conservation Study; there is also current land occupation uses, and more information about the last study that was conducted in 2015.

There are also maps included that show town owned land and their locations. There is also a Land Use & Planning packet from 1993. The town planning goals from 2015. All of these committees stopped after putting their reports out. Having this committee as a permanent commission to provide guidance to what would be best for the town.

One idea is to create a box on the town website to house all of the documents to review.

Member Fonda asked if Director of Public Works Merola could mark up a map of the parcels that the town needs to maintain.

c. Review Town Owned Properties and Current Zoning.

There is a zoning map is in the packet and the listing of town properties for the committee members to review.

5. Citizens Statements: None

6. Adjournment

Motion: Vice Chairman Armin motioned to adjourn at 8:30 p.m.; seconded by Member Symanski.

Discussion: None

With all in favor, the motion is passed.

**Respectfully Submitted by: Kathleen Daly, Clerk
2023**

September 29,