

NEWPORT CITY PLANNING COMMISSION
Minutes of July 21, 2020 Meeting

Members present: John Monette
Mareo Oldacre
Denis Chenette
Chris Vachon

Others present: Charles Elliott, zoning administrator
Paul Monette, Mayor/meeting host
Mark Kane, SE Group

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the meeting was held remotely.

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM.

Upon motion made by Denis Chenette and seconded by Chris Vachon, the minutes of the July 7, 2020, meeting were unanimously approved.

Mark Kane from SE Group was then called upon to participate in discussion of the preliminary work undertaken to date with regard to development of the new city plan. He noted that the SE Group proposal broke the process down into five steps and that his organization would be involved primarily in the first four steps of the process. A webpage has been established for the purpose of providing information to the general public throughout the process. At this point, the webpage includes links referencing several prior plans and studies. It is accessible through the city website.

Discussion focused primarily on the first two elements of the process. The first element involves determining the foundation of the new plan. Mark advised that several past plans and studies had been reviewed in detail to identify the most important themes and desired outcomes established in those documents. Definition of those themes and outcomes will in turn define the starting point of development of the new plan. Documents reviewed included the following:

- 2018 waterfront and downtown master plan
- The recent community health and wellness study
- The various plans and studies related to the downtown designation.
- The 2018 studies related to the outdoor recreation economy.
- The 2017 White and Burke strategic analysis.
- The 2016 age friendly community plan.
- The RUDAT plans and studies.
- The most recent version of the prior city plan.

His initial thoughts included the following:

Prior plans focus heavily upon:

Defining the downtown from several perspectives, including recreation, development, policy and planning, as well as the extent of the downtown district, its characteristics, "vibe" and contribution to the city.

Newport's role as a regional hub for economic activity, recreation, employment and health care.

Efforts to create a robust, resource-based recreation destination (he suggested elevating this theme in importance as a unifying foundational element and expanding upon its importance to people who actually live in the community).

Evolution from an agricultural/timber/railroad based economy to the increased diversity inherent in a regional center. While agriculture is not a significant economic component within the city itself, the city nevertheless hosts significant services essential to the needs of agriculture that service the entire region and beyond.

These points were discussed at length and several points were mentioned, including increasing business activity by positioning Newport as a distribution center, encouraging development of businesses providing technological support for recreation and natural resource activities, the fact that development in adjoining communities does benefit the city in several ways by stimulating demand for services within the city (restaurants, culture, health care, housing, shopping), the need for the plan to show community residents potential benefits available to them (it was noted that sections of the current plan read as though written as a travel guide for nonresidents who are not familiar with the area). Other points included the significance of housing affordability as a factor in making the community livable and the need to keep the downtown active and vibrant on a year-round basis, rather than seasonally. The question was raised as to whether meeting with area realtors and other residential developers would provide some insight into the factors that lead people to purchase homes in the city --- What are they looking for? What led them to choose Newport over other communities?

The second phase of development of the new plan, the vision phase, was briefly touched upon. In that phase, broader themes should be considered such as the city's role in the region and recreation as a cornerstone of the regional economy.

Under old business, responsibility for pulling together the information needed to update several of the mandatory elements of the plan was assigned. Dan had advised that he would take the educational facilities plan and the flood resilience plan. John will take the utility and facility plan, the policy statement regarding preservation of rare and irreplaceable areas and the relationship of the plan to the regional plan. Denis expressed interest in working on elements related to Lake Memphremagog, recreation, transportation, housing, the downtown and libraries. Chris will help others with their chosen areas as requested and will take on any areas that are not assigned to anyone else.

There was no new business.

The next meeting will be on August 4, 2020 and will be held remotely.

Upon motion made by Denis Chenette and seconded by Chris Vachon, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:45 PM.

Minutes taken by the chair, in the absence of the secretary.

(Unofficial until approved)

