

**ATKINSON PLANNING BOARD MEETING
MINUTES
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 21, 2023**

Members:

Sue Killam, Chair (not present)
Vice Chair Turell (present)
Ted Stewart (present)
Paul Wainwright, (present)

John Ottow (not present)
(Master Plan Team)
Heidi Mahoney (not present)
Bill Baldwin– Selectman Ex Officio
(present)
Hannah Rizzo, Alternate (not present)

Others Present

Julie LaBranche, Planner
Karen Wemmelmann, Recorder
Sue Coppeta, Master Plan Committee
Ken Grant, Master Plan Committee

Anne Brenton, Master Plan Committee

Kate Rochford, Master Plan Committee

Call to Order:

Vice Chair Turell called the meeting to order at 7:34 PM. He explained that Chair Killam could not be present and he will be acting as chair for the meeting. He informed the audience that there will be a presentation about the Master Plan and the Housing Needs Assessment.

Master Plan: Milestone Summary Presentation: Sue Coppeta

Ms. Coppeta came before the Board and explained that the Master Plan Committee is at a halfway point. The project started in September and it was anticipated to be an 18 month plan. Resilience Planning and Design, LLC, the consultant, did a lot of information gathering. The data gathered by them has been sent to a drop box for the Master Plan Committee and will be transferred to the server once the project is complete. The consultant has been working on an existing conditions report and the Committee has been working on community outreach. The existing conditions report is complete. It is nine chapters long and is on the website. The Master Plan Committee has thoroughly reviewed the report and is happy with it. It will be the starting point for forming the master plan.

While Resilience was pulling the data together, the Master Plan Committee has been working on an outreach and engagement report. The report started with branding in order for the Master Plan to become a recognizable project in Town. Posters have been put up, there has been a mailer, they have posted on Facebook, and they have their own page on the Town website where all their minutes can be found. They were in the Town newsletter. They have also advertised in the Carriage Town News. Members have attended the senior luncheon. There were two sessions on the April 11, 2023 forum. Over 120 participants signed in. Over 300 people completed the survey on-line or on paper. Paper copies of the survey were available at the Town Hall, the Library and the Community Center. The Committee is happy with the response. All the results were input into Survey Monkey. Resilience tabulated the results and have a first draft of the outreach and engagement report. The Master Plan Committee received it June 8, 2023, has reviewed the report, there has been some feedback and Resilience is editing it. The Master Plan Committee should receive the edited report next week. It will be available to be posted on the website and copies will be available. It is about

32 pages with a summary of all the reports and graphics. There are 200 pages of raw data at the end of the report. Ms. Coppeta stated that the videos at Atkinson Academy done by Member Ottow gave the Committee a lot of positive attention.

The Committee is now at the vision part of the master plan process. It is working on a vision statement for Atkinson. It is putting together prior master plan data and visions, what it has learned from the existing conditions report and what it has learned from the outreach and engagement report to get to the vision statement.

Ms. Coppeta read the draft vision statement into the record.

Atkinson's vision is to retain its rural residential character and its historical resources, protect natural resources and nature, encourage a diversity of housing opportunities, and provide and ensure for basic services, infrastructure and amenities, that serve the greater community and provide for the health, safety and wellbeing and enjoyment of its residents.

Atkinson aspires to recognize and balance the competing needs of resources, funding, demographics, environmental impact and community desires through wise resource planning, strategic planning, governance and community efforts.

Ms. Coppeta requested input from the Planning Board. The Committee anticipates expanding the vision statement with a preamble to give historical background from past master plans and Town history. At their next meeting, the Committee will work on what specific areas and objectives to focus on.

At their last meeting, the Committee went through a future land use exercise with Resilience. Resilience recommended that they look at areas in Atkinson and identify them by their unique qualities, not focusing specifically on zoning. An examples is the "maze", a housing development built in the late 60's, which consists of mostly one acre lots and is laid out as a grid. It is different from the cul de sac neighborhoods in the rest of Town. Another example is the area around the Lake.

Ms. LaBranche asked if there was any discussion about the fact that we live in a capitalist society that focuses on growth which makes it difficult for Atkinson to keep its rural character.

Vice Chair Turell pointed out that Chair Killam has frequently stated that developers create land. They can buy up a neighborhood, knock everything down and rebuild.

Member Stewart appeared.

Selectman Ex Officio Baldwin stated that building may slow down but population will increase significantly. He stated that based on a study done about 15 years ago, Atkinson population is supposed to cap at 12,000.

Ms. Coppeta pointed out that Atkinson population is currently 7,000. The Board discussed areas that could be used for future development and agreed that it would be difficult for Atkinson to reach a population of 12,000 due to zoning and other issues. Federal Census data is projecting a population of 7,600 by 2030.

Vice Chair Turell remarked that there are three farms left in Atkinson and a lot of the remaining land has issues. He also pointed out that development might be possible if Town water and sewer were installed. Many of the large lots could be cut down and the Town could get around 50% more houses.

Ms. Brenton remarked that in the report it was stated that people want to preserve Atkinson's history of farming. Member Stewart stated that it is difficult to show respect to farmers so that they do not want the money and would rather keep their land, especially when there is no profit. There are ways to incentivize not cutting up a piece of land.

Ms. Coppeta stated that there is pressure to look at zoning to see if everyone is treated equally and incentives are given equally. The Planning Board can work hard to change zoning, but any major changes probably will not pass.

It was mentioned that the State mandated that accessory dwelling units be allowed for people other than family members. Ms. LaBranche remarked that the State may mandate other housing requirements in the future. Vice Chair Turell pointed out that the Board needs to study detached accessory dwelling units. Ms. LaBranche pointed out that there is a housing crisis and it is possible that the State may require the Town to make changes.

Member Stewart responded that if a State mandate comes down, the Planning Board will react to it.

Ms. LaBranche stated that a future land use chapter in a master plan looking forward 10 to 15 years, will need to acknowledge and address more housing such as detached accessory dwelling units.

Mr. Grant stated that it will come down to what Atkinson can handle as far as water and sewer. The other issue is Article 28A. If the State requires water and sewer be installed then the State should make funding available. He suggested water and sewer be addressed first. There are no water sources in Atkinson, but there are many wells in Town, including a lot with 30 or 40 foot protection radiuses. These are land use decisions that have nothing to do with the master plan.

Ms. Coppeta returned to the vision statement and formulating goals that are in sync with it. Vice Chair Turell suggested outreach, possibly, include focus groups of citizens in formulating the goals. Ms. Coppeta stated that it has been discussed but no consensus has been reached. Resilience will be working on writing the plan. The Committee will continue to have monthly meetings with the consultant. The Committee has requested the draft in sections, but Resilience has informed them that they should have a complete draft for the Committee in the November – December time frame. Once a draft master plan has been submitted, the Master Plan Committee will review it thoroughly before it is sent to the Planning Board. Once it is delivered to the Planning Board, the role of the Master Plan Committee will be complete. The Planning Board will go forward with public hearings.

Ms. Coppeta informed the Board that \$49,000 has been spent on the contract with Resilience so far. They had a \$75,000 budget and Resilience has assured them that they should be able to complete their tasks within budget.

Ms. Brenton encouraged everyone on the Planning Board to read the raw data in the surveys. Member Stewart stated he has looked at the report and if members of other boards read it, the budget process would be much easier.

The Board discussed the survey results. Vice Chair Turell remarked that the results need to be put into actionable items. Townspeople need to vote for the actionable items and the budget items at Town meeting.

Mr. Grant pointed out that people should understand the cost of services. There are hundreds of pages and many different answers. Vice Chair Turell point out one example is giving a school tax break until a child reaches school age.

Mr. Grant remarked that areas regarding taxes, impact fees and costs should be considered in the master plan process.

Housing Needs Assessment Project Update: Julie LaBranche

Ms. LaBranche came before the Board to give her presentation on the housing needs assessment and the regulatory audit. She has received 140 responses to her survey.

Page 2 gives the time line for the needs assessment and the regulatory audit. It has been modified by one month for the needs assessment findings. She is on track to finish both projects in October.

Ms. LaBranche would like feedback from the Board before going further. Survey questions 1-10 are percentages of what people said. Survey question 11 is open ended. She is proposing to create some narrative to explain the responses in the survey. For example, grouping things together by topic, such as land use changes or zoning. She believes a lot of people have never seen a zoning map of Atkinson. She suggested a copy of the zoning map, and some of the data from the land conservation plan about percentages of land use be included in her narrative. The existing conditions chapter from the master plan should also be included because it will lay out exactly what the percent of land uses are in Town. It will also give some context to inform the reader when they read the comments in the report.

Ms. LaBranche explained that pulling together this information would take more time and requested approval from the Board to go forward.

Vice Chair Turell agreed and remarked that it will explain what the current situation with zoning is. Ms. LaBranche added that it will answer how close the Town is to build out, how much land is left to develop and also other constraints such as limited Town water and sewer, wetlands, and land that is marginal for development for a variety of reasons.

Member Wainwright commented that in terms of build out, he received a report that gave him a summary of all the parcels of land in Atkinson and their tax situation in what he believes was

2021. He was able to count up the number of parcels without buildings, how many were two acres or more and so on. He was unable to determine the potential to subdivide for some of the developed parcels because of factors such as terrain, wetlands, zoning and frontage. There are some large, single-house lots available in Atkinson. One potential for development would be house lots that could be subdivided. Member Stewart pointed out that many of these large lots cannot be subdivided due to terrain issues, such as wetlands or slope.

Ms. LaBranche informed the Board that this will be part of the explanation in the narrative. All these elements need to be considered.

Ms. Coppeta stated that there are extractions from the census data that could be included. She suggested a survey of lots of one acre or less and homes 1800 square feet or less. She stated that many people believe that Atkinson is mostly two acre zoning, but the truth may be different. Member Wainwright stated that he has data on square footage of parcels and he can sort his list by lot size. The Board agreed to look at this data.

Ms. LaBranche will move forward with the narrative and email a draft to the Board members for their feedback within the next couple of weeks. She requested response by email since the July meeting will be busy and there may not be a workshop in August. She informed the Board that she is also working on the regulatory audit.

Ms. LaBranche informed the Board that the focus of the regulatory audit is affordable housing and the parts of zoning that influence housing, so she does not expect a zoning warrant in 2024. She does not recommend zoning changes that would influence housing without continued discussion. Vice Chair Turell agreed. The housing needs assessment grants were applied for in order to get a snapshot of where Atkinson stands as far as housing at present, what is public opinion and how zoning and land use regulation dovetail with those parts.

Selectman Ex Officio Baldwin pointed out that only 145 people responded to the survey and he feels it would not be a fair or accurate assessment based on that low number.

Ms. LaBranche stated that the survey would not dictate the content or recommendations of the housing needs assessment, it will be a snapshot of peoples' opinions, it will inform the assessment, but will not dictate the results.

Member Wainwright pointed out that over half of the survey respondents were age 61 and over. Member Stewart pointed out that the survey respondent demographics mirror the demographics of people who show up for Town meeting.

Ms. LaBranche stated that 19 people stated that they would participate in a discussion group. Member Wainwright suggested breaking down ages for people who would like to participate in a discussion group. The Board agreed and Ms. LaBranche stated she would look at it.

Ms. LaBranche would like to coordinate with the Master Plan Committee about a public event regarding affordable housing. There are misperceptions about affordable housing and workforce housing. She will develop a power point presentation to put on ACTV and on the website. A lot of people think of workforce housing as a cement block apartment building. She will put some examples and design styles that would fit in with the rural character of Atkinson online. Either existing buildings or new construction could be used.

Ms. LaBranche stated that there is existing construction that could be used as affordable housing. The Board discussed affordable housing in Atkinson that resembles traditional New England housing, but are multifamily or have accessory dwelling units. Vice Chair Turell stated that there is land in Atkinson that is not suitable for single family homes but could be suitable for multifamily or affordable housing.

Ms. LaBranche stated that incentives for affordable housing would have to be created and the Town would have to promote affordable housing to the development community. Member Wainwright stated that with house lots costing \$250,000, no one wants to build affordable housing. Ms. LaBranche stated that it is possible to say that workforce housing is not feasible in Atkinson. Ms. Coppeta stated that it is important to know what housing exists in Atkinson.

The Board agreed that a major issue is the high cost of land. Also, building materials are too expensive to build low cost housing. Other towns with affordable housing have the infrastructure to support it. Ms. LaBranche feels that an endpoint of the housing needs assessment will be an answer which the Town can give to the State on the possibility of low income or affordable housing in Atkinson.

Planning Board Procedure Update: not discussed

Public Hearings: none

Minutes: May 17, 2023

Member Wainwright made a motion to accept the minutes of the May 17, 2023 meeting of the Atkinson Planning Board as amended. Selectman Ex Officio Baldwin seconded the motion. Vote: 4/0/0. All in favor. The motion passes.

Member Wainwright made a motion to adjourn. Selectman Ex Officio Baldwin seconded the motion. Vote: 4/0/0. All in favor.

Meeting adjourned at 8:48 PM.

The next Planning Board meeting will be on July 19, 2023 at Atkinson Town Hall. There is no workshop meeting scheduled for July 5, 2023.