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**MINUTES OF THE MASTER PLAN PUBLIC INPUT SESSION
NOVEMBER 30, 2023
IN THE MACOMBER ROOM**

MP Members Present: Lorne Jones, Jane Lannon, Rodney Rowland, Peter Schwab, Conni White, Pamela Yonkin

MP Members Absent: Kathy Richards

The Public Input Session was attended by approximately 20 residents of New Castle.

Pamela Yonkin, Chair of the Master Plan (MP) Committee opened the meeting and PowerPoint presentation with a general introduction and statement that a Town's Master Plan is updated every 10 years. This committee started working on this latest revision in early 2022.

Purpose:

- A MP is meant to be practical and pragmatic and conceptual in nature.
- What do we want New Castle to look like in 10 years?
- A MP should aid the Planning Board (PB) in forming ordinances and stewarding smart growth
- A MP is not a legal document but provides a legal basis

Approach:

- A town survey of opinions and attitudes was undertaken and data was collected and compiled
- 178 residents took the survey
- From this input, the committee created a vision statement for the MP
- Important features: beauty of the island, historic features, small town feel, tax rate

Concerns:

- Overdevelopment
- Sea level rise and coastal storms
- Pedestrian safety

Focus Areas:

- By State RSA, a MP must contain a vision statement and a land use section
- The MP Cte chose to also highlight historical and natural resources, utilities and energy, community facilities and transportation

Each MP committee member presented a brief description of the section of the MP that he/she had researched. Each section was organized by describing existing conditions, survey results on that topic and recommendations.

Mr. Rowland went through the highlights in the historical resources section of the MP describing existing conditions of increased pressures in the Historic District for demolitions and more

intense development and modern building materials. These requests need to be balanced with survey results of residents wanting to preserve the existing streetscapes and the need to inform new homeowners in the Historic District to appreciate and preserve the historic nature of the area.

Ms. White presented her section of the MP on natural resources. She highlighted much work that has been recently undertaken or is currently in progress such as culvert replacements in several locations in town and remapping efforts of all freshwater and tidal wetlands in New Castle. She highlighted maps that showed the impacts of sea level rise (SLR) of 2, 4 and 6 feet on New Castle. The Causeway and a low section of Route 1B near Pit Lane were highlighted as two extremely vulnerable spots on the Island. Recommendations for future action include continued protection of all wetland buffers, education of New Castle residents especially waterfront owners, and continued work on resiliency grants and other actions with the Rockingham Planning Commission, Conservation organizations and UNH.

Mr. Schwab addressed the topic of utilities and energy. He touched on the existing power sources of oil, propane and heat pumps and the lack of natural gas on the island due to financial considerations that probably won't change in the near future. The survey did favor the Town making it easier to have back up power sources such as solar panels and generators. Mr. Schwab credited the New Castle Energy Committee, established in 2007, with efforts to collect data on energy usage in public buildings and efforts to minimize the cost of that energy. Recommendations moving forward include working with utility companies to provide resiliency during major storm events, burying power lines when feasible, encouraging expanding broadband services and making it easier for alternative power sources to be incorporated in Town.

A town resident asked that a section on water and sewer be added to this section of the MP which Chair Yonkin and Mr. Schwab agreed to look into.

Mr. Jones reported on the community facilities section of the MP starting with highlighting all the physical assets and services of New Castle. The survey revealed a general satisfaction with the Town owned facilities and usage. However, it also indicated an interest in improving the services especially for seniors and increasing on-line technological functionality.

A library trustee added that the survey was done close to 2 years ago and since that time a lot of services have already been added to the library offerings many which would appeal to seniors. Another comment from a public member was to include the post office in our list of facilities. In addition, it was brought out that there has been raised awareness and evolution of sentiment about the future of Town Hall in the last number of years.

Ms. Lannon kicked off a discussion on her section on transportation by describing Route 1B as the major thoroughfare through town with its narrow and winding features crowded by all forms of transportation by wheel or on foot. Approximately 3,000 cars a day pass through New Castle on Route 1B. The survey showed that most residents are content with the maintenance of State and town roads in New Castle, but safety of pedestrians and bicyclists is a major concern. Ms. Lannon spoke of Safepath and the TAP grant and the importance of continuing the efforts with

public and private ventures as well as with the State on the bridge rehab and causeway redevelopment. A resident raised the issue of potential parking issues near the newly purchased former Coast Guard property. It was also brought up that the MP committee should check the accuracy on who owns the parking spaces on Bridge Street across from the hotel and if that is the actual name of that street.

Ms. Yonkin presented slides with demographic statistics on New Castle including a population of 1,000 people currently in 568 housing units as of 2020. A resident asked the definition of “seasonal housing” which were reported as having 114 units. Ms. Yonkin committed to uncovering that definition from the Rockingham Planning Commission who provided the statistic.

Ms. Yonkin went over the land use section of the MP in lieu of committee member Kathy Richards who could not attend the meeting.

Ms. Yonkin reviewed the existing conditions. Other than State and Federally owned lands, New Castle is an island consisting of 568 housing units including 64 multi-family houses, a downtown café, a B&B and a major hotel. In the last two years 9 new housing units have been added to the inventory at an average cost of double from the previous decade. The survey indicated a significant level of concern about the trend to tear down existing smaller homes and constructing new and larger homes and the general perceived over-development in town. Cte member Ms. Lannon added that in writing the MP, the members had to be cautious to not overstep in addressing this issue of the perception of “overbuilding”. Another concern involves strong enough regulations on short-term rentals. One recommendation is to have a town legal budget to enforce both the spirit and letter of the existing building code.

Comments from the public:

- The cte well identified big issues in town, but some of the recommendations did not go far enough especially in the energy section. This MP should direct the PB about where it should focus. Take a look at solar power. Review the statutory language in the State RSA’s. Look at alternative energy and make our recommendations stronger and more proactive. Consider broader thinking on the subject: Should we put solar panels on the Common Building? On Town Hall?, as examples.

- In the existing conditions we should mention that New Castle has 8 islands. Correct the facilities section to reflect that we own the Commons. Our tax rate is the lowest in the State, but we have the highest assessment in the State.

- Important to know what are our priorities so when there is conflict, what is most important?
- Re. assessments: they affect everyone. Important for residents to know that assessments can be challenged.

- A question was asked whether the committee used a constrained or unconstrained approach to the plan. Chair Yonkin replied that we used a constrained approach. The comments suggested that we look at an unconstrained approach, for example, asking "do each of the departments have

what they need for the next ten years?". This would ensure that departments are thinking ahead and that the plan captures any future needs, for the purposes of grant submissions. The committee agreed that it was important to gather input from all constituents, including the departments, now that the plan has been drafted, to ensure it captures feedback from each department about what might be part of their 10 year plan.

- The recommendation that addresses the Causeway should also emphasize the bridge on the other side of the island. Both are important and cause for concern and attention.

A letter had been written and submitted to the cte by resident Curt Springer in advance of the meeting with a request to read it into the minutes as he could not attend in person. The cte had every intention of doing so, however, it was overlooked. Consequently, that letter is included in full below.

Respectfully submitted,
Darcy Horgan
MP Cte Recording Secretary

"My name is Curt Springer and I reside at 98 Cranfield Street."

"I can't say enough about the work of master plan committee members and the thoughtful process that led to the current document. I am thankful for the courtesies extended to me as I participated in the process, not a member of the committee."

"I would like to suggest changes to the proposed Historical Resources section, so that it will read as follows:"

"(start of suggested changes)"

"Historical Resources

Existing Conditions

The Historic District Commission (HDC) was created with a narrow focus to administer the Historic District Ordinance (Ordinance) according to state law (RSA 674:46-a) and the evaluation criteria contained in the Ordinance. The HDC's zoning ordinance guidance is to protect the unique streetscapes that have defined New Castle as a sense of place for four centuries. This area is under constant threat as homes change hands and owners seek new and larger places and as changes in climate cause greater concern for weather related impacts to historic structures. Over the last few years, the effects of this threat are recognized by changes to the areas outside the historic district. The concerns over this change have led to a renewed interest in strengthening and even expanding the District to preserve historically significant buildings and streetscapes. The past decade has shown that construction activity in the Historic District is related to the economy. Hence, the last few years have experienced an increase in the number of Historic

District Commission hearing applications. This time period has also seen a number of new homeowners coming from outside the immediate area who may not be familiar with HDC guidelines, procedures or building code requirements. Given this, the past decade has witnessed :

- Requests for demolition in the district*
- Requests for larger homes and additional requests for solar panels*
- Requests for the use of alternative (non-traditional) building materials*
- Changes in building codes that impact HDC considerations.*
- Requests for public hearings when a work session would be a prudent and beneficial first step.*
- Frequent questions about HDC procedures and what is approved and not approved in the District.*

Future Condition/Town Vision

New Castle could consider expanding the Historic District, applying its narrow regulatory powers to a wider area with more 20th century dwellings.

A complementary measure would be to establish a Heritage Commission as provided by RSA 674:44-a – 44-d. A Heritage Commission is authorized to work in the entire town, inside and outside of the Historic District. While it lacks regulatory authority, it has wider authority to research and promote the history of the town and its structures and to work with townspeople and boards. It is not limited by the constraints of considering a request to change a single property in town. A town vote could allow the existing HDC to assume the powers of a Heritage Commission, avoiding the need for yet another committee."

"(end of suggested changes)"

"A compelling reason for the town to make the HDC also a Heritage Commission is that it has been exercising powers assigned to heritage commissions but not to historic district commissions for at least several years."

"Specifically"

- "RSA 674:44-b.I.(a) Survey and inventory all cultural resources."*
- "RSA 674:44-b.I.(c) Assist the planning board, as requested, in the development and review of those sections of the master plan which address cultural and historic resources."*

"I omitted this legal justification from my suggested revision because the Master Plan is to be used to move forward and its text should not contain anything that might be taken to be criticism of any board or committee."

"It was stated incorrectly at a recent meeting that assuming the powers of a heritage commission would put burdens on the HDC. All of the heritage commission powers are optional."

Curt

