



Groton Sustainability Commission

Meeting Minutes

Date: July 29, 2008

Time: 7:30 p.m.

Location: Nashua River Watershed Association, River Resource Center
592 Main Street, Groton, MA

Attendees:

Commissioners: Al Collins, Carl Canner, Carl Flowers, Chase Duffy, Chris Christie, Leo Laverdure, Mike Roberts, Richard Hewitt

Liaisons: None

Other: Michelle Collette, Steve Webber

Commissioners absent: Michael McCarthy

Minutes taken by: Leo Laverdure

GENERAL

- We will use the SustainableGroton Google group for distributing materials and coordination of Commission activities but not for deliberation. A separate mailing list, sustaining@townofgroton.org, accessible from our public web site, will be used for general communication with the broader community.

HANDOUTS

The following handout was distributed:

- Agenda (Mike Roberts)

DISCUSSION

Review of Minutes from 14-Jul-08 Meeting

- Steve reported that the Commission web site (a sub-site of the Town web site) is ready to go with content (charge, meeting schedule, minutes, etc.)
- **Action (Leo): Forward all Study Committee docs to Steve for posting**
- **Action (Leo): Draft a statement defining a "sustainable community" for use on web site**
- **Action (Leo): Update and send contact information for all active Commission participants to the SustainableGroton Google group**
- **Action (Leo): Send SustainableGroton email addresses to Steve for initial population of the public sustaining@townofgroton.org email list**

- **Action (Leo): Create a table showing membership of all Work Groups**
- **Action (Communications WG): Create a primer/FAQ on a “sustainable community” for use on web site as well as hardcopy documents (flyers, folders, etc.)**
 - [Question: Should this be for a generic sustainable community or for Sustainable Groton?]
- **Vote: Sustainability Commission to have a presence at GrotonFest as part of the “sustainability corner” that Groton Local is organizing (unanimous).**
 - **Action (Leo): Request that the Commission be invited.**

Agenda item #1: Review Commission Work Plan

- **Action (Chris & Al): Research grants available to the Commission**
 - **Action (Chase): Contact Commissioners of Trust Funds**
 - Use of funds includes printing and postage.
 - Will need additional funds to conduct baseline sustainability assessment once this task is defined by the Sustainability Plan WG.
 - **Action (Sustainability Plan WG): Develop sustainability metrics for all three legs of the sustainability “stool” (Environment, Economy, Society) for use in baseline and on-going measurements.**
 - Will also need some funds for conducting public workshops as part of creating the Sustainability Plan.
 - Funds to be held by the Town treasurers.
- **Action (Communications WG): Invite Press to Commission Meetings**
 - **Action (Leo): Invite Hiroko Sato of the Lowell Sun to participate in our meetings and to consider a regular column that includes Commission topics**
- Question: Will the Commission be an advocate for various by-law studies, e.g., wind, affordable housing, etc.
 - Answer: The intent is that the Commission will indeed become an advocate, but we are not yet ready to undertake the discussion of what this means.

Agenda item #2: Liaisons

- We can email invitations for liaisons to other town bodies (boards, departments, etc.) as well as use their hardcopy mailboxes.
- **Action (Steve): Develop an initial list of non-government organizations and businesses in town for Commission review for (hardcopy) mailing of participation/liaison invitations.**
- [Steve: Was there an action for you to create a Contact database for everyone interested in sustainability? My notes are unclear on this point.]
- **Action (Michelle): Set up Town Hall mailbox for Commission**
- Seniors are available to help with copying of documents for distribution.

Agenda item #3: Sustainability Plan

- Michelle explained that the Town had a statutory responsibility to update the master plan every 10 (?) years, and that work needed to begin soon to update the 2002 master plan. This should be coordinated with the Sustainability Plan work, which could start by reviewing the current master plan for sustainability. Other plans (Community Preservation, Affordable Housing, Open Space, etc.) could also be brought into this integrated framework.
- Steve noted that there really are two distinct functions: planning and permitting, adding that these might well be done by two different boards. Steve further noted that the current master plan has an important omission – it does not include an economic plan.

- Leo noted that the three legs of the sustainability stool (environment, economy, society) cover an awful lot of space. How can we keep the work of the Commission doable? He recommended that we focus on the threats to sustainability and how Groton can be resilient in the face of these threats if and when they materialize.
- Carl F. recommended that we focus on showing how to help people be successful.
- Steve suggested inviting Gary Hirschberg (CEO of Stonyfield Farms) to present ideas along these lines.
- Steve also suggested that the Planning WG start by writing a product announcement, i.e., “this is what we have done to make Groton more sustainable” for different planning horizons.
- Leo suggested that we adopt a well-defined methodology, for example, that of *The Natural Step* that is being used by a number of towns in SE MA (e.g., Seekonk) and N Rhode Island. If we don’t like something about that approach, then modify it as needed, or select another methodology.
- Steve suggested that we consider sustainability as a budgeting process, asking the head of the Finance Committee: What part of your budget goes to making Groton more sustainable?
- Chase asked “How does Groton fit into a sustainable region?”
- Chris: Other towns are ahead of us.
- **Action (Planning WG): Develop a list of other communities with Sustainability Commissions (starting with the list generated by the study committee).**

Agenda item #4: Groton School presentation to Commission

- Bob Collins of Groton School has contacted the Commission asking to present its plans for a “bio-energy” power plant at our meeting on 26-Aug.
 - Presumably the purpose of the presentation is to receive feedback and support. (The Commission is not in a position to “approve” any plans.)
 - A package of materials would be sent to the Commission in advance of the presentation.
 - The Commission welcomes this presentation by a leading town institution.
 - **Action (who?): Formally invite Groton School to present to the Commission.**
 - Since this is the first presentation to the Commission, it will be a learning process for us. Leo suggested each work group review the proposal as a way to help understand the key sustainability measures focused on by each WG.

Other Discussions:

- The Communications WG will hold its first meeting before the next Commission meeting
- Leo noted that at the end of the last meeting there was an inconclusive discussion about how much to focus on some of the major threats to sustainability, in particular climate change and peak oil. He felt that this was essential to keep the Commission focused and vital. Others, including Richard, had expressed concern that this could be politically divisive. Leo and Richard had continued their discussion after the meeting and came to agreement that:
 1. It is important to identify and prioritize potential threats to sustainability.
 2. We should present these as uncertain futures that merit our attention because of their potential impact. They don’t have to be without controversy to be on our list of threats.
 3. We should look to engage as broad a cross-section of views as possible across our community.
 4. We should look initially for “low-hanging fruit” – broad-based, common actions that we can take to measurably improve Groton’s sustainability without large costs.

Actions

- [See ***bold, italic*** text throughout these minutes.]

FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, August 12, 2008 at 7:30 p.m. in the offices of the Nashua River Watershed Association (NRWA).

Future meetings will be held at the NRWA.

The schedule for future meetings is the 2nd and 4th Tuesday of every month.