

Meeting Minutes

Date: April 24, 2012

Location: Nashua River Watershed Association

Time: 7:30 PM

Attendees:

Commissioners: Mike Roberts, Chris Christie, Lisa Wiesner, Leo Laverdure

Guest: Scott Harker, George Barringer, Becky Barth, Michelle Collette, Susan Daniel

Minutes taken by: Stephanie Strickland

Agenda:

1. A conversation with Mr. Scott Harker
2. Review outline of Groton Sustainability Plan
3. Lisa to present listing of short term commission projects/actions
4. Adjourn

Agenda Item #1: A conversation with Mr. Scott Harker

Discussion

- Mike: First let me give a brief background. Three weeks ago at Johnsons I ran into Scott Harker and we had a conversation on sustainability. Scott has spoken out on concerns about how sustainability is seen in the Master Plan. So I invited Scott to come talk to us and hopefully be able to come to a common denominator on how we feel about sustainability. Respect is very important and I believe that once an idea is brought out it belong to the entire group for discussion. Now we're here to discuss sustainability as it was shown in the Master Plan. How do ~~you~~ we move forward and find common ground?
- Lisa: I would like to mention that by saying we can't explore some topics makes me feel somewhat censured. I think it's important to not exclude some topics to have an open conversation.
- Mike: I'm going to respectfully disagree because I don't want to get distracted by other topics right now. That is an important topic that should be discussed at a later date and with more people. Right now we need to be clear on what our position is though.
- Scott: I accepted to explain why I have taken the position I have against the Brundtland definition. Two and a half months ago I began reading the Master Plan and realized I wasn't clear on sustainable development. I went to the library and found out the term doesn't exist. In 1972 or 73' someone decided to put these words together to try and encompass the economy as well as the environment. People are unable to put their hands around the definition. The word will eventually become meaningless and I don't want to see that happen. In the Master Plan they have taken the term and put a meaningless definition to it and told the town this is what the Master Plan will be based around. A Webster's Dictionary definition of sustainability does not exist. The closest once can come to an acceptable definition is to the use a combination of definition of two separate words: sustain and ability. Sustain is a verb and means to strengthen or support

physically or mentally. Ability is a noun and is the capacity to do something. Combining the two gives us to strengthen or support, the capacity to do something. If you reverse the combination the ability to sustain can now be defined as the capacity to strengthen or support. The Brundtland definition is off the mark on what those two words together would mean. I would like to see the commission think about what the words actually mean. Sustainability to me means something that maintains/preserves something fundamental. What makes the town of Groton sustainable?

- Mike: It's on purpose that there is no definition for sustainability because it's not a word; it is a term of art. It's a word or phrase that has a precise meaning. As a term of art its definition needs to be made clear. I recommend we put a forward in the Master Plan on what this means.
- Michelle: I want to thank you for inviting me. Just to give some background: there are two parts to the Master Plan. Phase one was just completed and the second part is the implementation plan. The planning board met with the sustainability commission and decided that there would be eight advisory groups. We debated the definition of sustainability and went with the one we chose because it was a global definition. To me it seems very straight forward. My concept of sustainability is more pragmatic. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts established ten sustainable development principles. Groton has scored highly on the Commonwealth Capital Score, which affects grants. Everyone looks at it differently, I look at it positively. I see it as really pragmatic. It's about the balance between the environment, economy, and the community. There are things we need to begin doing such as producing more food locally. Recycling is important, which Groton does very well with. GELD is wonderful with conserving electricity. There are also a lot of good things happening with Groton housing and universal accessibility. People's ability to work close to where they live is also important for our future. These are some of my own personal ideas of what sustainability means to me.
- Scott: Michelle I think you hit on my question. What makes the town of Groton sustainable?
- Michelle: I believe it's the people.
- Chris: Number one, Scott, I would like to thank you for coming and wish you had come sooner. I think we might have failed at having more people participate and I wish we had more. Sustainability has been around for thousands of years. They probably used the words balance and moderation earlier. We try to focus on environment, economy, and community, but sustainability in other countries is completely different than it is here. You mentioned sustainable fishing and to me that is about balance and not eating them to depletion.
- Mike: I think that's interesting because Scott said sustainable fish, not fishing.
- Chris: I think it's along the same line and that was only an example. I think the definition the planning board used could be improved, but it hits the points.
- George: These are essentially the regulations that describe the word. Any of these definitions work because they are all similar.
- Scott: What provides sustainability to this community?
- George: I think it's the same thing that has driven America from the beginning: the desire to make America better.

- Mike: The people make the community sustainable, which is why it's important to educate them.
- Lisa: I really enjoyed listening to Michelle speak. I have a hard time having patience with these last few months and the passing of the Master Plan. I think it's presumptuous to come and take down the work of the community the past few years. It's offensive for you to break down the word into two parts and not relate it to the world around you. This argument has been so academic that we are afraid to talk about the progress this is going toward achieving. My question to you, Scott, is are you aware of the global issues? In 2050 there won't be any fish in the sea. We are looking at our system crashing but instead we are looking at what it means to sustain. We need to talk about science and the realities of our future. We should talk about how we plan as a community. Sustainability is life and it's a spectrum of understanding for everyone. I do appreciate being able to discuss this with you and because so many people are afraid of the word it is important to discuss.
- Becky: I have a hard time being unemotional and I do appreciate your words and clarity. I think that harping on the words instead of the concept is a waste of time though.
- Susan: I really appreciate this meeting and the ability to have these kinds of debates because it is important that we understand each other. This word is both science and emotion and I appreciate hearing both. It is important we understand both perspectives. Everyone comes with different perspectives and what I believe is do not harm and leave the world how you found it. I appreciate debate and also feel that action is required. It's important that we leave the world in a better place than we found it. We are on a crash course to destroying our planet, but I am hopeful that there are communities that care and want to make a difference. As a commission there was a lot of work put in to the definition that was in the Master Plan but I appreciate the holes in it because that is what allows the ability to debate. I think that to not move forward would be a big mistake.
- Leo: I know that on this committee we spent several meetings discussing definitions. There are many definitions, but that goes for every word. This definition is new because it's a new thing that people are beginning to realize. All indications are exceedingly worrisome. The ocean had become more acidic, which affects everything in that chain. The climate is changing and no one on the planet has control of many of these things. Climate control cannot be agreed upon by different countries. There are at least fifty frameworks and there are common ideas. Chris mentioned the Greeks and moderation but Athens didn't last forever and it's because they ran out of an important resource. They denuded the hills of trees to build ships until there were no trees anywhere around the city. People are a key part of why Groton is sustainable. The land in Groton was fertile and the water was good. Groton will not be able to sustain itself on its own. The economy, community, and the environment need to be in balance and I think the economy has been off balance. I don't think it's the best definition of sustainability, but our plan is a wonderful start. The wisdom of how to come together, use resources, and make the right choices is the most important thing.
- Mike: I come at this from working with indigenous people in other countries so I see the limitedness of what can be done. Sustainability is no longer an elective, it is a required course. If we are not sustained, we will become extinct. The charge of this committee is to develop a measurably sustainable community. We have never crafted a definition of what a sustainable community is. Scott and I have crafted a few definitions. Originally

we came up with, “A sustainable community is one where the inhabitants are committed to protecting and conserving those aspects of the community which sustain (maintains) a community physically mentally, and spiritually”. Scott then came up with, “A sustainable community is a community whose inhabitants have the capacity, and the commitment, physically, mentally, and spiritually, to supporting, strengthening and conserving its character and personality”. The three legged stool are constituencies of the population. We can’t accomplish anything without all three. I think it would be good if there would be public meetings where we could explain.

- George: It shouldn’t come as a surprise that there is a public relations issue. It would be in your best interest to meet in the town hall. It will help everyone. You should be formal and have an agenda and bring yourself into the mainstream.
- Lisa: I have been saying that all along as well.
- Scott: First to the question I asked. Enlightened self-management is what makes this community sustainable. I mean no harm or demean. The point I’m here for is not to see the plan die. This committee is suspect and there is the issue of whether sustainability is applied appropriately to the Master Plan. Residents believe the definition used is misleading. I don’t want to see the planning board somewhat slapped in the face for something that was misunderstood. This plan could be voted down and I don’t want to see that. I’m not here to seek support. I’m just trying to help you get away from this air of suspect. More could be done with this definition and it could be made more understandable to the public.
- Lisa: Hearing you speak again, it sounds like there is no awareness of what was said for the last hour. I would really recommend you accept the help of all of us to understand these issues.
- Mike: I wanted to use this meeting to understand what Scott and many other people in town are thinking and explain to him what our thoughts are.
- Lisa: What have you gained from what we have told you tonight?
- Scott: The issues that there are decreasing viability of air, ocean, and land are very real to me. The change that makes up viable starts with us. The objective is to maintain viability.
- Lisa: I think what you just said is that the solution is in the community, but you contradicted yourself by saying that enlightened self is the solution.
- Leo: I think you have incorrectly read into something Scott said. I think he meant enlightenment of the town, not of the individual.
- Mike: People are concerned about social engineering.
- Lisa: I think this is a political discussion, disguised as an academic one.
- Scott: When I say enlightened self-management, there is nothing political about it.
- Lisa: What is your definition of sustainability?
- Scott: Supports or strengthens; the ability to endure.

Action Items

- 1. Mike: To move our meetings to the Town Hall.
Chris: I second
Unanimous agreement**

- 2. Mike: We need to advertise meetings more affectively and have more open forums and workshops.**
Unanimous agreement