

FINAL

**CITY OF LEBANON
WEST LEBANON REVITALIZATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MINUTES, JANUARY 12, 2021
REMOTE VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS
LebanonNH.gov/Live
5:30PM**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Jim Winny (Chair, City Council Rep.); Lauren Groves; Chet Clem (Vice Chair); Chris Lin; Dean Cashman; Laurel Stavis (Planning Board Rep.); Gregorio Amaro;

MEMBERS ABSENT: Graziella Parati; Kevin Purcell (Economic Development Commission Rep.)

STAFF PRESENT: David Brooks, Planning & Zoning Director; Shaun Mulholland, City Manager

1. CALL TO ORDER: Chair Winny called the meeting to order at 5:31 pm

A. Review of meeting procedures and NH RSA 91-A "Right-to-Know" requirements.

Mr. Brooks shared the State directive and participation details for the online meeting in Microsoft Teams. All speakers identified themselves.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

A. December 15, 2020

***A MOTION by Ms. Stavis to approve the December 15, 2020 Minutes as presented.
Seconded by Ms. Groves.***

Roll Call Vote:

Members voting in favor included: Mr. Clem, Mr. Lin, Mr. Cashman, Ms. Groves, Ms. Stavis, Chair Winny.

****The Motion was approved (6 - 0)***

3. NEW BUSINESS:

A. Overview of CBD Zoning, Development Review Process

Mr. Brooks reviewed the current Central Business (CB) District zoning provisions, allowed uses, and dimensional requirements. He discussed proposed amendments currently under review by the City Council. There was discussion of the differences between the current CB regulations for West Lebanon Village and the recently-adopted Lebanon Downtown (LD) District provisions. Ms. Stavis hoped the Committee would be able to recommend amendments to the CB District to help achieve what is desired for West Lebanon Village. There was discussion about potential uses of the Westboro property within the zoning regulations.

Mr. Brooks reviewed a map depicting the extent of the CB zone and surrounding districts. There was discussion of the ownership of properties within the CB District for outreach purposes. Mr Brooks briefly discussed the Site Plan Review process by the Planning Board.

There was discussion about parking requirements within the CB district and the need to identify potential locations for public parking in West Lebanon.

B. Discussion of Urban Planning with Architect Dan Winny

Architect Dan Winny shared a presentation regarding general concepts of urban planning. He suggested the City's Master Plan and the recent visioning charrette and summary report represent very good planning work relative to West Lebanon Village.

He noted there are three areas of potential intervention, including public street improvements, public amenity and recreation improvements, and private-sector development. He noted the relative consensus from the Master Plan and visioning effort that West Lebanon Village should have a "real Main Street". The Master Plan talks about infill and redevelopment, higher-density mixed-use projects, and commercial storefronts with upper-story residential units, which implies a fairly significant level of redevelopment compared to current conditions. He pointed to downtown White River Junction, Hanover, or Woodstock as potential examples of what some people mean by a real Main Street.

Mr. Amaro arrived at 6:00pm

Mr. Winny noted the current traffic level of about 14,000 cars/day along Main Street can be positive for some and negative for others. Due to the location of rivers and bridges, traffic is funneled toward West Lebanon and concentrated along Main Street. He suggested this condition is unlikely to change and may be difficult to mitigate. He noted some of the urban design improvements highlighted in the visioning charrette report as good ideas for Main Street.

Mr. Winny reviewed a conceptual mixed-use building with parking based on current CB zoning provisions. He suggested a general vision of apartments over commercial space with a focus as a center for local shopping seems appropriate for Main Street. He noted that more apartments would increase the overall housing supply and could have other potential benefits including higher transit usage, support for local businesses, and increased neighborhood vitality. He noted most properties are well below the allowed dimensional standards of the CB district.

Mr. Winny showed an analysis of the existing building footprints and parking areas in West Lebanon Village. He noted how much pavement for parking and circulation is available compared to building square footage. He noted that previous parking utilization studies indicate that existing parking, both public and private, is not heavily used in the area.

Mr. Winny noted the existing development pattern is heavily auto-oriented and not reflective of a downtown area. Lot configuration and ownership patterns impact opportunities for redevelopment. Small lots are difficult to redevelop. More could happen on larger lots or on lots that could be assembled by common ownership. Mr. Winny suggested that it should not be difficult to find a building type that would make for a good main street. A shared vision is important to motivate people, but it must be realistic.

Mr. Winny feels it is important to figure why more redevelopment hasn't happened in West Lebanon. He suggested it is not because of zoning, parking, or traffic levels, but may be the complicated lot configuration and ownership pattern and the lack of a long-term vision. Mr. Winny recommended talking to landowners to find out what would make them redevelop or participate in improving Main Street. Local commercial brokers should also be approached to learn more about the market.

There was discussion of methods to improve West Lebanon Village, including through aesthetics, additional public parking, communication and outreach to local business and property owners, encouragement and incentivizing new business and redevelopment. There was agreement that a clear vision with stages built in was needed for the area since there is so much to do. It was

noted that some of the recent successful reuses of properties could form the nucleus of a redevelopment effort if similar businesses could be attracted to the area. Ms. Stavis suggested that a non-profit could be created to fund certain projects.

It was noted that owners frequently operate in their own self-interest and the challenge is implementation and how to incentivize redevelopment in the broader interest. The community needs to set the tone and trust that individual owners will do their part to achieve the greater good. It was noted that the City owns very little land in West Lebanon and property owners will need to work together to achieve common goals. The potential opportunity to connect existing parking areas behind buildings is the type of project that will take cooperation among the owners and the City to achieve.

There was agreement on the need to operate on multiple tracks simultaneously, including outreach, aesthetics, synchronizing public and private improvements, and on the urgency of doing something with Westboro Yard. It was suggested that a mini “chamber of commerce” is needed for West Lebanon Village to help articulate a new vision.

C. Discussion of Westboro Yard Lease Proposal

City Manager Mulholland talked about ongoing efforts to have the Westboro buildings removed. He reviewed several potential options under consideration by a strategy group including state legislators and some city councilors, including seeking the release of previously-appropriated funds, adding more funds in the next state budget, offering a short-term loan to the state, raising funds to demolish the building ourselves, and enforcing the state building code. He noted the City Council will be providing direction to the administration on February 3rd relative to Westboro Yard.

He suggested that demolishing the Westboro buildings would be an investment in the future and a benefit to the community. The South Main Street “dry bridge” project will invest \$8-10 million in West Lebanon and provide access into Westboro. There was agreement that demolishing the buildings is essential to the revitalization of West Lebanon.

There was discussion about how the Committee could be helpful to the process. Mr. Mulholland suggested it would be helpful to have the Committee members attend the February 3rd Council meeting to advocate for West Lebanon. Mr. Mulholland noted that getting the buildings down can be done, but the City needs to decide how much risk to accept and how badly it wants to get it done. There was agreement that a multi-faceted approach is best. It was noted that funding relief from the federal level could make it easier for the state to release frozen funds.

Mr. Mulholland reiterated the City’s intent to proceed on multiple fronts. The City Council will decide which efforts to pursue. There was a suggestion of starting a conversation on social media to help spread the word quickly and to create a movement of people to help push this issue along.

Ms. Stavis MOVED to authorize Mr. Clem, Mr. Lin, and Ms. Groves to draft a statement to be delivered by Councilor Winny at the February 3rd City Council meeting and that we review that statement at our next West Lebanon Revitalization Advisory Committee meeting.

Mr. Clem seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote:

Members voting in favor included: Mr. Clem; Mr. Lin; Mr. Cashman; Mr. Amaro; Ms. Groves; Ms. Stavis; Chair Winny.

****The Motion was approved (7 - 0)***

D. Creation of Subcommittees

- Westboro Yard

- Outreach

Chair Winny noted that a Westboro subcommittee will be created. In addition to drafting a support statement for the Council, the subcommittee should think about what the City should do with Westboro if the buildings are demolished and the City gets control. Ms. Stavis agreed to participate along with Mr. Clem, Mr. Lin, and Ms. Groves.

Chair Winny suggested another subcommittee would be for outreach to local business and property owners to learn more about what would trigger them to make improvements and how the Committee and the City could help owners achieve longer term goals. It was noted that a listserv for West Lebanon residents exists, but something more specific could be created for business and property owners.

There was discussion about defining the work of the subcommittee. Chair Winny felt outreach would help the Committee learn who community partners might be and who is not interested in participating. Mr. Clem and Mr. Lin expressed interest in participating with outreach. Chair Winny will communicate with other Committee members about interest in either subcommittee. Mr. Cashman expressed interest in the subcommittees and asked for more information on past communications with property owners. Chair Winny summarized that Mr. Clem, Mr. Lin, and Mr. Cashman would be involved with the Outreach subcommittee.

It was suggested that efforts to consider a non-profit organization should get started to get the gears in motion.

Mr. Mulholland suggested a narrowly-focused effort for outreach, such as communicating about a specific project for connecting existing parking areas behind buildings. He felt it could develop into a public-private partnership to create additional public parking. A specific concept might be easier for property owners to consider and comment on and could lead to other projects.

Chair Winny asked the Outreach subcommittee to put together a plan for contacting property owners. Mr. Amaro expressed interest in resident outreach when the time comes. The Committee will talk more about focused discussion points on January 26th.

4. OTHER BUSINESS:

None.

5. ADJOURNMENT:

A MOTION by Mr. Clem to adjourn the meeting.

Seconded by Ms. Groves.

Roll Call Vote:

Members voting in favor included: Mr. Clem; Mr. Lin; Mr. Cashman; Mr. Amaro; Ms. Groves; Ms. Stavis; Chair Winny.

****The Motion was approved (7 - 0)***

The meeting was adjourned at 7:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
David Brooks
Planning & Zoning Director