

City of Ellsworth
Steering Committee Meeting Minutes
Monday, November 27, 2023 5:30 PM

Chair Brian Langley, Vice-Chair Jennifer Sala, Members John DeLeo, Rick Lyles, Eric Marichal, Erin Witham, Paul Markosian, Jon Stein, and Casey Hanson were present.

Nine members present

Member Nick Turner was absent

One member absent

City Planner Matthew Williams and Assistant City Planner Elizabeth Ouellette attended the meeting.

Two staff members present

1.) Call to Order

Chair Langley called the meeting to order at 5:30PM.

Call to Order

2.) Introductions and Housekeeping

Member Erin Witham joined the meeting via ZOOM. Alison Tobey and Keri Ouellette from BerryDunn joined the meeting via ZOOM.

Introductions & Housekeeping

3.) Adoption of Minutes from the October 23, 2023 Regular Meeting.

Member DeLeo moved to adopt the minutes. Member Marichal seconded the motion. **The vote to adopt to minutes from the October 23, 2023 Regular Meeting was UNANIMOUS.**

Adoption of Minutes

ADOPTED

4.) Discussion and Action on Resignation of Nancy Smith (elected as City Councilor).

Chair Langley said that Member Nancy Smith was elected as a City Councilor so she has to resign her position of the Steering Committee. Langley said that Smith had sent in a letter resigning her position and he sent back a note thanking her for her service. Langley opened the public hearing at 5:33PM, there were no members of the public in attendance. Langley closed the public hearing at 5:34PM.

Nancy Smith Resignation

Member DeLeo moved to accept the resignation of Nancy Smith. Member Stein seconded the motion.

Member Markosian made a comment that he was grateful for Smith's contributions to this Committee and he was excited to work with her in her new role as City Councilor. Member Marichal asked City Planner Williams if they would be filling the position or if they were going to operate as a 10 person commission. Williams said that they would operate as a 10 person commission, but if another person were to resign, then they would open the application process again.

The vote to accept the resignation of Nancy Smith was UNANIMOUS.

ACCEPTED

5.) Visioning Workshop

City Planner Williams began by saying that the survey results were sent to the members before this meeting. He said that BerryDunn has been analyzing the information obtained and they are working on putting it together in an understandable format. He then turned the workshop over to BerryDunn.

Visioning Workshop

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Keri Ouellette started the workshop by saying that they were going to be working towards making a vision statement for the Comprehensive Plan. She said that they have taken the information obtained in the public engagement events and the survey to come up with a list of common values and priorities. She said that they would be asking for feedback and then the group would work on developing vision statements. She said that they would be collecting feedback through MentiMeter which is an online platform. Ali Tobey then began with an overview of the public engagement events that have taken place thus far. Tobey then went into the demographic information from the survey. She said that there were 475 responses in total with 334 respondents being homeowners. There were 60 respondents who rented their home and 64 respondents who lived outside of Ellsworth. 103 respondents worked or owned a business in Ellsworth and 33% of commuters traveled more than 20 miles to work. Also, 37% of the respondents were younger than 50 years old. Tobey then went into the highlights from the survey, going over the common answers and themes that came out of the survey. She said that the topics which were most heavily addressed was transportation, investment in road infrastructure, sidewalk and pedestrian connectivity, and affordable housing. Ouellette then gave a brief overview of the results and engagement study that were sent out to the group beforehand. She said that housing and traffic/transportation were the two largest issues that have been identified through the survey results and the public engagement activities. She said that cost of living concerns were also prevalent throughout the survey responses and engagement feedback. Ouellette then gave a definition of “values” and “priorities” and explained how they work with each other to inform the vision of the Comprehensive Plan. She said that the vision sets the priorities that reflect the values of the community.

Ouellette then went over the core values that have been identified from the survey and public engagement. She then turned the group’s attention to the MentiMeter online exercise where she asked the group to enter responses to certain prompts that she will put up on the screen. The first prompt asked the group to say what they thought other core values of the community are that were not reflected on that list. The group then entered their responses to the prompt on the online format. Ouellette commented that she did not see many responses talk about education and she found that surprising. Vice-Chair Sala said that it was likely due to the demographic of people who responded to the survey. She said that most of the respondents were older residents who did not have children so they did not care as much about the schools. There was some discussion about how difficult it is to reach parents since they are very busy and are less likely to take the time to fill out a survey. Sala made a mention about how some of the comments were interesting and seemed to be contradictory. There were some responses that were weary of more housing and some that advocated for more. Member Witham said that she thought the list that BerryDunn came up with was a great start and with the additional comments from the group, there are many strong values that can be reflected in the vision statement. Member Marichal agreed with Witham. Member Lyles recommended that BerryDunn make a word cloud with all of the common words that came up. Ouellette said that they had the ability to make a word cloud and they would send it to the group. She said that they are also tagging certain themes/concepts that have come out of the responses. Member Markosian said that he was surprised to see a lack of mention about encouraging economic activity

Overview of Survey Results

Core Values

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and building out Ellsworth's economy. Ouellette said that was definitely something that would be addressed. She said that it did come up in some survey results and general feedback. Witham said that likely most of the respondents only used local stores and did not own them so they may not have been focused on economic development. Member DeLeo made a comment that a lot of respondents said that they do not want industrial uses anywhere in the City. Sala said that is likely due to people not understanding what industrial and manufacturing uses actually means, noting that people likely think it means smoke stacks and big factories. DeLeo said that there needs to be more manufacturing and industrial uses in Ellsworth. Chair Langley said that there seems to be a need for more education about what these uses actually mean. DeLeo then made a comment about how most of the housing that is being built is not going to be for families, so it will not impact the school enrollment. Markosian said that school enrollment is going down in Ellsworth and that the focus should be getting more family housing so more kids can enroll in the schools. Langley said that this is another instance where the public needs more information about the actual meaning or impacts of these uses.

Ouellette then moved onto the community priorities that came out of the feedback. She said that these priorities are reflective of what the community wants to focus on in the next 10 years. The prompt for this portion was "what are the other community priorities?" The group then entered their responses to the prompt. Marichal made the comment that the road conditions should be mentioned as a separate priority as well as being encompassed in other priorities. Member Hanson said that they need to use the Comprehensive Plan to direct the City Council and City Staff and they should identify the most major priorities and focus on them first. Williams suggested putting the priorities in tiers and focus on the first tier first and the other tiers if they have time and resources. Williams then said that a lot of the priorities and values are in conflict with each other. He said that the community should be educated on the consequences of enacting some of these changes that are addressed. Ouellette made the comment that the roads may have been mentioned more since people drive every day and so they are always thinking about the roads as opposed to some of these other priorities. Langley said that they should address the priorities that they can actually achieve on their own and look to partnerships for the larger issues. Lyles said that the vision statement should be left broad so it can encompass all of the values and priorities of the community. He said that in the chapters is where they can get into the details of which projects would be better for the City to take on. Sala agreed and said that they should start broad and then get into the details later. Lyles said that they should mirror other communities and have a broad, short vision statement with limited detail about the actual issues. Sala said that they should include using "creative solutions" into the statement. DeLeo said that there needs to be more Public-Private Partnerships to address some of these issues since the City cannot do most of these things on their own. He said that the State should also be involved in these partnerships especially as a source for funding. Lyles agreed and said that in the vision statement there should be a broad mention to Public-Private Partnerships with some details of how to make that work in the chapters later on. Ouellette made a comment that there was also not much mention about climate change and it did not seem like a high priority for the community. The group said that they had also noticed that in the responses as well, but they still thought that it should be addressed in the Plan.

**Community
Priorities**

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Ouellette then asked the group to split up into small groups and work on the next prompt together. The next prompt was “developing a vision” and the groups were asked to create short vision statements about each of the identified values and priorities. She said that this exercise mirrors the vision statement from another municipality that the Committee had previously said was something they liked. Ouellette said that this information would be compiled and used when they are developing a draft vision statement. The groups then entered their responses to the prompt on the online format. Ouellette then reconvened the group and said that they would come up with a draft vision statement to show to the Committee for review and feedback. Williams then had the groups go around and discuss their statements that they thought was the most important or their favorite. The group then discussed all of the different responses to the prompt and their thought processes in coming up with them. Lyles asked if there would be a handout with all of these responses on there. Ouellette said that they could compile the results and share it with the group. Ouellette also said that this would be just the first workshop in the vision statement and the group will have several more opportunities for feedback throughout the process.

Vision Statements

Ouellette then showed the group the vision statement from the other municipality and asked the group to consider the format that they would like the vision statement to be presented in. She asked the group to think about the tone that they would like to set through the vision statement. She asked the group to come up with a word or phrase that reflects their vision for Ellsworth in the next 10 years. The group then entered their responses to the prompt on the online format. Langley said that he would like to see Ellsworth’s history be reflected in the tone and format of the vision statement. The group then discussed some of the aspects of Ellsworth’s history that they would like reflected in the plan. Ouellette said that this was helpful information to know and it would definitely be reflected in some way in the vision or the Plan in general. Langley and Sala then said that they could compile some historical information and send it to the groups and consultants so the information can be used. Sala said that a lot of the ideals and values that Ellsworth had in the time of their founding in 1800 are still relevant and exist today. Hanson made the comment that addressing Ellsworth’s history would be a good thing but it is important to acknowledge that the Indigenous people were here first and the focus cannot be on just the white history of Ellsworth. Ouellette then said that they would share the raw information from this session and a draft vision statement with the group. Williams thanked the group for their feedback and said that they would look for a way to combine all of these ideas into the vision.

Format/Tone

6.) Public Comments

There were no members of the public in attendance.

7.) Staff Comments

City Planner Williams asked the group if they thought there needed to be a meeting in December since the regularly scheduled meeting was cancelled. The group decided that they would rather have 2 meetings in January then try to fit one into December. Williams said that he would finish the scheduling of the additional meeting via email and asked the group to be on the lookout for his email.

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8.) Adjournment

Member Markosian made a motion to adjourn. Member Hanson seconded the motion.
Chair Langley adjourned the meeting at 7:20PM.

Minutes prepared by: Elizabeth Ouellette, Assistant City Planner.

Meeting adjourned
at 7:20PM

*Agendas and minutes
posted on the City of
Ellsworth's website:
ellsworthmaine.gov*