

City of Ellsworth
Steering Committee Meeting Minutes
Monday, January 22, 2024 5:30 PM

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

Nine members present

Member Erin Witham was absent.

One member absent

City Planner Matthew Williams attended the meeting

One staff member present

1.) Call to Order

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

Call to Order

2.) Introductions and Housekeeping

Keri Ouellette from BerryDunn joined the meeting via ZOOM. Chair Langley said that Members Markosian, Stein, and Hanson were going to be in attendance for the meeting, but were running late.

Introductions & Housekeeping

3.) Adoption of Minutes from the November 27, 2023 Regular Meeting.

Member Lyles moved to adopt the minutes. Member Marichal seconded the motion. **The vote to adopt to minutes from the November 27, 2023 Regular Meeting was UNANIMOUS.**

Adoption of Minutes

ADOPTED

Lyles asked for an update on the word cloud which was discussed last meeting. City Planner Williams said that it had not been completed. Keri Ouellette, from BerryDunn, said that they could compile that and send it to Williams as soon as they are able.

4.) Presentation from Ellsworth Arbor Commission

Chair Langley introduced the Ellsworth Arbor Commission. City Planner Williams said that the City has recently appointed an Arbor Commission and they have requested to come and speak to the committee. He said that they will be talking about their goals for the Commission. Mary Blackstone and Tabitha White were present to give the presentation. White, the Chair of the Arbor Commission, said that they were excited for a meaningful discussion and an updated Comprehensive Plan. She said that they are comprised of several different professionals who bring a wealth of expertise to the Commission. Blackstone, the Secretary of the Commission, then went into a little bit of what the Commission does. She said that one of their top priorities is to revise their ordinance. She said that they also want to tackle some other projects: a new Tree Warden job description; a Forestry Management Plan; continuing the Tree City USA Program; and obtaining funding for management of the forested resources around the City. Blackstone said that they are taking some of the tasks which were previously conducted by Green Ellsworth. She said that the largest challenge they are facing now is obtaining data. She said that the Commission wanted to plan for where they want to be, but they first have to figure out where they are. She said that they want to start collecting regular data regarding trees and take an inventory of all of the trees that are under their purview. She said that they want to work together with City Staff and the other Commissions to get information gathered. She said that their goal is to show the importance of maintaining the trees in the

Arbor Commission

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City and show why it is needed. Blackstone said that they are looking into setting up a system for tree maintenance. Member Marichal asked why they are having issues obtaining data. Blackstone said that before the Commission was created, there was no one person designated to gather this information. She said that previously, the Tree Warden position has been the City Manager, and there has not been someone who solely dealt with the trees. She said that it is available, but they need to put it all together.

Chair Langley asked if the Commission would only be dealing with the trees in the downtown/urban core area or if they would be dealing with the trees all around the City. Blackstone said that they would be dealing with all of the trees in the City, noting how fortunate Ellsworth is to have so many trees. She said that they cannot control what happens on private property, but they can address any issues that come up that may impact all trees in Ellsworth like pests or diseases. She said that something that impacts one tree, can have the possibility of impacting all of the trees in the City. Member DeLeo noted that there have been some sporadic projects pertaining to trees that have been conducted by the City in recent years. DeLeo asked if this Commission would start overseeing those types of projects and be responsible for the long-term maintenance of the trees. Blackstone said that those projects are why the Commission is in existence and why there should be a Staff person responsible for this work. She said that issues come up every day which a Staff person can deal with. She said that the right management plan is always needed when new trees are put in. DeLeo said that there are a lot of groups which volunteer to do work and asked if the Commission would now be responsible for coordinating those volunteer efforts. Blackstone said that they want to be a part of training for these volunteer groups to better help their efforts. She said that any sort of education they can offer would be a benefit. Member Lyles asked if the Commission reports to the Council and if any of their recommendations would go straight to them. Blackstone said that they would report directly to the City Council. Williams said that the Commission was here this evening to talk about what they would hope would be in the Comprehensive Plan, but their suggestions go directly to Council. Lyles asked if the Commission would keep making recommendations after the Plan was completed. Williams said that there would be a group which deals with the implementation of the Plan and they could discuss the makeup of it at a later date.

Blackstone went through the stated mission of the Commission. She said that they were there to ask the Committee to include their recommendations in the Comprehensive Plan. She said that their Forestry Management Plan would be completed around the same time as the Comp Plan. She said that the Forestry plan was a recommendation in the 2004 Comprehensive Plan. She said that Staff needs more people who are experts in the arbor field to better inform decisions. She said that they also wanted a certified arborist to be given the title of Tree Warden instead of the City Manager. She said that person would take the lead on the Arbor Commission. She said that they are currently working on their budget for all of these items. Blackstone also added that they are working on revising their ordinance regarding the protection of trees and the use of trees in public spaces. She said that one of their wishes would be to look through the Unified Development Ordinance with an eye towards protection of trees. She said that the Commission is there to offer their expertise to Staff. Blackstone also noted that there are a lot of different things that the City

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does which impact the trees and that the Arbor Commission should be included in. She said that through education, they can mitigate any of the threats to trees. She said that they would like the trees to be a working component of the natural landscape, not just an aesthetic component. Marichal noted that the Commission seemed to have the energy and the expertise to complete their goals, and he was looking forward to see what they will achieve. Langley asked if there was any vision of what a proper canopy would look like. Teresa Davis said that it would depend on the area, but a healthy canopy is the goal. She said that there are a lot of areas where the canopy is not healthy because of the maintenance of trees and the types of trees planted. Vice-Chair Sala asked if there would be particular types of trees that would work in different spaces. Davis said that it would and the type of soil also impacts which trees survive in which places. Langley asked how the Staff position would be structured. Davis said that there are a lot of different ways that it could be done, noting that a lot of municipalities do it differently. She said that they are working on finding what kind of framework would work best in Ellsworth. Blackstone said that they can learn something from each municipality, but they need to find their own model. Davis said that it is also difficult because the municipal trees are in different locations so it would not be illustrative of Ellsworth's trees. Blackstone said that they need to find a model that is feasible for Ellsworth.

5.) Update Regarding Vision Statement

Chair Langley turned the meeting over to Keri Ouellette from BerryDunn. Ouellette said that she had provided a draft vision statement to the Committee based on their input from the November work session. She said that they took their notes and compiled all of the information into 10 key principles and an overall statement for the City. Langley said that he thought it was clearly written and he liked the format. Member Lyles said that he thought there were a lot of words on the page and it could be pared down some more. He said that he did not like that the principles were numbered since it seemed like they were listed in order of priority. Ouellette said that it was not intended to display priority, and they can look into other types of display. Lyles suggested a circular display. Vice-Chair Sala suggested using symbols for the principles instead of numbers. Lyles said that he liked that idea. He also suggested that some words be in bold which show the general understanding of each principle. Member Marichal said that he agreed with Lyles that there should not be numbers and that some of the principles could be shortened. Marichal also said that he liked the idea of bolding the main message of each principle and then have some words in normal text explaining the principle. Member Turner said that as a vision statement, he thought what was presented was adequate and all of the detail on how to achieve the principles should be later in the Plan. He said that he thought all of the goals were reflected in the statement. Langley said that some wordsmithing is needed but the content is good. City Planner Williams asked the Committee what kind of display they would like for the principles. Lyles suggested a circular style to take away any suggestion of priority. Member Hanson said that she was unsure about a circular graphic, but she liked the idea of symbols. Marichal said that a circular graphic would be too hard to read. Lyles said that they do not want to start the Plan by showing a priority. Ouellette said that they would look at different styles and provide them to the group for a decision. Ouellette asked Williams how to best review those. Williams said that once the options are in, he can email it to the Committee to see if it is better. After that, he will put it out to the public for comment. He said that

Vision Statement

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they do not have to wait until the next meeting. Lyles encouraged the consultants to give a few different options. He did say that he liked the general vision statement. Member Markosian said that there should be less explanation in the principles, and the details be included later into the plan. Williams said that the public engagement surrounding the vision statement will be very similar to the survey. He said that BerryDunn is making a landing page on the Social Pinpoint website where people can go and read the vision statement and then answer a short survey. He said that the questions on the survey would be “do you like this?” and “why?” so it gives people an opportunity to elaborate if they want to. He said that Staff will also be setting up some physical locations in case people do not want to access the statement online. He said that they may have some money in the budget for paid advertising, but regardless there will be social media advertising. Member DeLeo suggested that all of City Hall be shown in the graphic. Hanson said that these principles are really just everything that someone could want and there are no specifics about what the biggest priorities are. Williams said that would be a question for the policy and recommendation section and talk about what realistically can be achieved in the next 10 years. Williams said that some of the principles could be removed. Lyles said that the vision statement is really the starting point and the plan is where it gets specific. Williams said that some of the principles may not be discussed in the policy section. Lyles said if that is the case, then they can change it later. Hanson said that the point of the survey was figuring out what the priorities are and that should be reflected. Marichal said that the main response in the survey was regarding road maintenance, but only infrastructure is mentioned in the statement which may be confusing.

Hanson suggested that the Committee member choose which five of the principles they think are the most important. Williams directed all of the members to take five minutes and choose their top five. Ouellette said that the nature of the document would cover a lot of topics and would discuss all ten principles. Williams then went through all of the principles and asked the members to raise their hands if they chose that principle as one of their top ones. Lyles said that there are a lot of the principles that can be connected to each other, so there should be some reformatting. Lyles also said that they need to be careful as to how they define certain phrases like “downtown,” to avoid any confusion once it goes out to the public. Member Turner said that none of these principles stand on their own and they are all interconnected. Langley said that the economy should be left vague enough to encompass all of the businesses in Ellsworth, but just downtown on Main Street. Ouellette said that they can take the feedback from the group and share some more options with Williams. Member Stein made a comment that the opening statement is unique to Ellsworth and he liked it. Turner said that there may be too much of an emphasis on nature when talking about tourism. He said that there are some people who come to camp but do not spend as much money at the stores. He pointed out that if businesses are state-of-the-art, they will draw more people downtown to spend more money which will help the economy more. Lyles said that they need to determine where the priorities are to decide where best to invest funds. He said that this was the exercise that they are working through with the Comprehensive Plan. He said that there are several things that will need to be prioritized and there are some things that the City may not be able to invest in right away.

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6.) Public Comments

Cara Ramano from Heart of Ellsworth asked if the principles that were not selected as the top five were going to be incorporated into the rest of the Plan. Chair Langley said that it would. Member Turner said that they did not officially reduce the number of principles, but it may be rewritten. Langley said that the principles that were not selected as top priority would still be discussed in the Plan. Ramano then asked if Heart of Ellsworth could come and make a presentation to the Committee. City Planner Williams said that they could coordinate that.

7.) Staff Comments

City Planner Williams introduced the new reporter from the Ellsworth American who was in attendance. He then said that the 2024 meeting was in the members' packets for their review. He said that if a member cannot come to a meeting to please let him know as soon as possible. Chair Langley asked if Assistant Planner Ouellette could send out calendar invites. Williams said that she would. Williams then said that the policies and recommendations are in their first draft. He said that City Staff would have focus groups to discuss the policies and then it will be presented to the Steering Committee. After that, it will go to the public for comment. He said that the Staff focus groups would be in the end of February and the Committee would get their first review of the draft at their March meeting.

Member Lyles said that the Ellsworth Housing Authority has an opening on their board and encouraged members to consider it. Member Stein said that later on this week there will be a Council Workshop on homelessness in Ellsworth. He said that there would be a lot of good information that may assist in the Comprehensive Plan.

8.) Adjournment

Member Lyles made a motion to adjourn. Member Markosian seconded the motion. **Chair Langley adjourned the meeting at 6:58PM.**

Minutes prepared by: Elizabeth Ouellette, Assistant City Planner.

Public Comments

Staff Comments

**Meeting adjourned
at 6:58PM**

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