

City of Ellsworth
Steering Committee Meeting Minutes
Monday, February 26, 2024 5:30 PM

Chair Brian Langley, Vice-Chair Jennifer Sala, Members John DeLeo, Rick Lyles, Nick Turner, Paul Markosian, Erin Witham were present.

Seven members present

Members Casey Hanson, Jon Stein, and Eric Marichal were absent.

Three 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 5:34PM.

Call to Order

2.) Introductions and Housekeeping

Ali Tobey from BerryDunn joined the meeting via ZOOM.

Introductions & Housekeeping

3.) Adoption of Minutes from the January 22, 2024 Regular Meeting.

Member Markosian moved to adopt the minutes. Member DeLeo seconded the motion. **The vote to adopt to minutes from the January 22, 2024 Regular Meeting was UNANIMOUS.**

Adoption of Minutes

ADOPTED

4.) Presentation from Heart of Ellsworth

Chair Langley then turned the meeting over to Cara Ramano and Zabet NeuCollins from Heart of Ellsworth (HOE) to give their presentation. Ramano began by thanking the Committee for their time and explaining that in the beginning of January, the HOE Board President sent a letter to the Committee to convey some information about what the organization does and what projects and initiatives they are currently working on. Ramano said that HOE is an economic development organization which champions the downtown district through historic preservation, small business support, and many other initiatives. Ramano explained that the National Trust for Historic Preservation is HOE's grandparent organization. She said that Main Street America came out of that organization to support historic downtowns. She said that the Maine Downtown Center is HOE's local parent organization and that HOE is an affiliate community of the Downtown Center and Main Street America. Ramano said that they were hopeful in November to become a full Main Street America community, making Ellsworth the 11th in the State of Maine. Ramano explained that HOE began in 2016 and grew out of the Merchant's Association. She said that during the COVID-19 pandemic, they tried to figure out how to stay afloat and continue to contribute to the community in a meaningful way. She said that they did work on a feasibility study and an asset mapping study with the Comprehensive Plan in mind. She said that they tried to tease out where Downtown stood and what assets are missing to determine what was needed moving forward to make Downtown a destination and remain relevant for the next 10 years. She said that HOE received funding for both studies and that the Comprehensive Plan was mentioned in all funding proposals. Ramano explained that the letter was submitted by the Board because a HOE representative was not on the Steering Committee so they wanted the letter to act as an official document and ensure that the voice of Downtown was heard. Ramano then detailed some of HOE's

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current priorities. She said that becoming a certified local government was some low hanging fruit that HOE had resources to make happen. The organization would also like to commission a Downtown Plan which would come after the Comprehensive Plan. Ramano said that the last plan was completed in 2008 and she hoped that a collaborative approach to the new plan will make it different. She said that there needs to be more attention and care from outside groups in collaboration with the City. She said that there are more opportunities now and some nonprofits are ready to partner more with the City on projects. Ramano said that another priority was pursuing a Historic District designation. She said that they are partnering with the City, Historical Society, developers, and a historic architect to bring a historic workshop series. She said that the series would be basic information on how a historic preservation district would work and why it is important for the building owners. Ramano then said another priority of HOE was to strengthen the Downtown's relationship with the Union River. She said that would include establishing a Riverwalk, cleaning up the shoreline, and trying to put their best foot forward in Downtown. She said that there are a lot of partners that are willing to do the work. She said that HOE can offer technical assistance to those partners. She said that nonprofits are willing to help with grant funding so the City would not have to pay for it alone. Ramano explained that because HOE is an affiliate of the Maine Downtown Center they are awarded 1 extra point on all Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) applications. She said that in November, if Ellsworth is designated as a Main Street Community, they will be awarded an additional 3 points towards all CDBG applications. She said that puts the City in a better position when applying for these grants. Ramano said that they were here this evening to make themselves available to the Steering Committee and get feedback and also to increase communication with the community about HOE and see if there is anything they can do to help the process.

Member Markosian asked Ramano to speak more about the extra points on CDBG applications and how it is a benefit to the City. Ramano gave an example of a recent CDBG application and said that they got an extra point on that application because the City is an affiliate of the Maine Downtown Center. She said that her understanding is that sometimes applications are scored very closely and that one point may make a difference. She said that once they become a Main Street America community there will be an extra 3 points which will help the City even more. She said that Ellsworth is in a unique position because the initiatives they are working on is behind what other comparable communities are working on. She said that most other communities are 5 to 10 years ahead of Ellsworth. She said that put Ellsworth in a good position since they are one of the only communities who are working on the development that Ellsworth is working on. She said that Ellsworth is being looked at as a community on the rise and there is so much work happening in Ellsworth so this is good timing to really make a difference. Markosian asked if there were any grants that have been applied for where the one point made a difference. Ramano said that she was not aware of any since there have not been many CDBG grants applied for. She said that once the City has a Comprehensive Plan in compliance with the state, there will be more opportunity for funding. Member Turner asked if this program was Federal or State funded. City Planner Williams said that it is Federal money that is administered through the State. Member Lyles asked how many points were available in the total application. Ramano said that she did not know. Williams said that usually it is between 50 and 100

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points. Lyles said that the extra point would make only a 1 percent difference. Vice-Chair Sala said that one of the priorities of the Historic Preservation Commission was to get Ellsworth as a certified local government. She said that once they have that, there will be additional grant funding opportunities. Ramano said that a lot more would be available to Ellsworth once they have that designation. She said that it would open up a lot of additional funding avenues. She said that this will help Ellsworth keep up the momentum of the work that is being done. Markosian asked how much the City contributes to HOE's budget each year. Ramano said that last year they received \$8,250 from the City, however this year they are requested more. She said that there has never been an organization in Ellsworth that has been able to bring in grant dollars to a certain district that has the structure that HOE does. She said that she thought the community had a deeper understanding of what the organization does and what benefits it can bring to the City. Lyles asked Ramano if HOE was present at any of the subcommittee meetings or the Expo to provide this information. Williams said that they were present. Ramano said that she did attend several public engagement events.

Ramano then said that she had some information to pass out. NeuCollins said that they had some information about the upcoming historic preservation workshops and provided the Committee with an overview of the dates and descriptions for each workshop. She said that all of the workshops would be held at the Library and run from the end of March throughout the Spring. NeuCollins said that if anyone is interested in learning more about HOE, they have their annual meeting on March 6th and more information will be provided. Ramano said that her last point on the historic workshops is that her understanding is they received a \$15,000 grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation and that is the first grant Ellsworth has received from them. She said that was a good thing because it gets Ellsworth on their radar and begins a relationship with them. She said that it was important to have that relationship since they are the ones who work with the National Park Service to decide on Preservation Districts. She said that HOE is trying hard to make those connections. Chair Langley asked where the closest designated historical district is. Sala said that it is the State street area which encompasses the old jail and City Hall. Ramano said that it was not on the national register. Sala explained that it is listed on some places but not on others. Ramano said that the City still needs the designation to save the buildings in the Downtown district. She said that Belfast and Skowhegan both have historic districts which are listed. She said that Skowhegan is the best example since it is fairly comparable to Ellsworth. She said that there is a lot going on in Skowhegan and it is safe to look at for what could happen in Ellsworth. She said that there is a lot of development happening because of the tax credits that come with the district designation. Lyles asked what area of Ellsworth is within HOE's purview. Ramano said that they had to designate a specific district. She said that it went from Steamy Buddah on Church Street, to Deane Street and Precipice Coffee, down Surry Road to Woodlawn. She said that it makes a rough triangle area. Lyles asked if the primary focus was Main Street or High Street. Ramano said that Main Street is their focus and they do not include High Street. She said that they also focus on the side streets off of Main Street and they are very important for Downtown development.

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5.) Vision Statement Review

Chair Langley then turned the meeting over to City Planner Williams to discuss the vision statement. Williams said that after the last meeting there were some comments on the length of the statement and the amount of principles. He said that BerryDunn has revised some of the language and made the principles more condensed. Williams then asked Ali Tobey from BerryDunn what the revision process was. Tobey said that they took the Committee's feedback and they parred down the principles to simple sentences. She said that they removed one principle that was requested by the Committee. Williams said that the numbers will be replaced by pictures as was requested by the Committee. Tobey said that they would. Williams said that he wanted to know how the Committee felt about the revision, making a comment that it was difficult to cut the amount of principles like the Committee had originally wanted. He said that he thought the nine that were remaining were important to the plan overall and so they should remain. Langley said that he did not think that anything was missed and that the statement presented looked good to him. Member Turner said that the vision always sets the ideal. He said that he thought the vision statement read very well and had a strong ideal. He said that he did not think that the principles were unattainable and everything in the statement seemed like it could be done in the next 10 years. Turner said that the only one that he thought was out of place was number five which started with the word 'proactively.' He said that it seemed obvious that the tasks would be done proactively and so he thought it should be removed and the principle should start with a verb like the rest of them. Vice-Chair Sala agreed with Turner and said that the bolded text should be at the beginning to the sentence like the rest of the principles. She said that the verb and the bold should be in the front. Member Lyles said that they could switch the parts of the sentence around.

Lyles then said that there was a lot of overlap between principles five and nine since five discussed infrastructure improvements and nine discussed transportation improvements. Williams asked Lyles if he thought transportation would be such a large issue that it should require its own call out. Lyles said that when the public reads principle five and it says 'infrastructure,' that they will think it means 'transportation.' Member Markosian said that if they did combine the two that it would reduce the number of bullet points. He said that the most obvious place to combine principles would be numbers five and nine. Sala said that once the symbols are present, they will be different symbols which will help differentiate the two. Lyles asked Sala what she would put as a symbol for principle five which just talked about infrastructure broadly. Sala said that she would put a water treatment plant or something like that. Lyles said that when people read the word 'infrastructure,' that they think it means something different than professionals do. Turner said that they should keep the two separate principles since transportation will be such a large issue for the population. He said that he did not believe that the transportation solution would be an expensive and elaborate bus system since no one would use it even if it was created. Lyles asked Turner what he would have instead. Turner said that would be the large discussion that the public would need to have. He also said that there are a lot of different transportation options and he did not think that the solution would be a bus system. He said that maybe the City would consider vans or small busses being utilized more. Langley said that the discussion will be what is important and that everyone needs to be included. He said that there are a lot of conversations that are happening at the State

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level about transportation. He said that it is important enough of a topic to require its own stand-alone principle. He said that transportation should have its own section of action plans and it deserves its own space. Member DeLeo said that they should encourage transportation from outside organizations that can bring people to appointments and other things like Friends in Action (FIA) does. Lyles said that FIA provides that service because the elderly population does not have access to transportation and that this service is a big benefit to public health. He said that transportation is a big problem in public health because people cannot get to the appointments that they need. DeLeo said that the public needs to know about what services there are and what is available to them. He said that the information needs to be more widespread. Langley said that was why he thought that transportation deserved its own spot in the vision statement. Turner said that they need to look at existing services and see how they can plan to sustain and expand on those services that people may not know about. He said that there are several resources available that people do not know about. Lyles said that there are organizations that make hundreds of trips per week driving people back and forth to their appointments.

Member Witham said that she thought the word ‘proactively’ was an important descriptive term for principle five and that it should remain. She said that she thought it should stay because they need to be proactive with infrastructure and not wait until it breaks to plan for a repair. She said that they should rearrange the sentence but keep ‘proactively’ in there somewhere. Lyles said that they should include a better description of ‘infrastructure’ in principle five so that it is differentiated enough from number nine. Witham said that nine should be clarified to mean all types of transportation, not just cars but walking and biking should be included as well. She said that there are many different forms of transportation. Tobey said that they can add some clarifying language to say that all modes of transportation are encompassed by that principle. She said that they would need to think about how to phrase that. Williams suggested using ‘active transportation’ and ‘vehicular transportation’ to make it clear. He said that they can discuss it at their next one-on-one meeting.

6.) Review and Discussion of Policy and Recommendations

City Planner Williams said that they are not going to be reviewing the policies and recommendations and that he was going to explain the process going forward. He said that City Staff is currently reviewing the policies and providing feedback to the consultants. He said that the policies would then go through the subcommittee process. He said that Assistant Planner Ouellette would be reaching out to schedule the subcommittee meetings for the end of March and beginning of April. He said that he would present a draft to the Committee before the end of the subcommittee process so they can have some time to review. He said that they will be devoting most of their April meeting to have a fuller discussion about changes and additions to this section. Member Lyles asked what the subcommittees will be doing in the meetings. Williams said that they will be reviewing the draft so there is something that they can respond to. Lyles asked if the Committee would discuss the policies first. Williams said that they would not but a copy would be provided before the subcommittee meetings so that they can prepare. Lyles asked if there would be a group discussion of the policies. Williams said that there would be after the subcommittees are done and that they would be reviewing the policies in depth at their

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April meeting. Williams then said that once the vision statement is complete that it will be pushed out to the community for feedback. He said that they will be using the subcommittees as a vehicle for that as well as social media and physical locations. Chair Langley asked how the subcommittees would work. Williams said that they would work the same way that they did last time but there would be a little more structure since there is a document that they will be reviewing and responding to. He said that they will be going through the suggested policies and action recommendations to get the public's feedback and potentially make some changes. Langley asked if there would be separate subcommittee meetings. Williams said that there would be. Langley asked what time the subcommittees will be at. Williams said that they will attempt to mix the times for the subcommittees to allow for more members of the public to be in attendance. He said that it was really dependent on the Committee's availability. He said that the meetings will be virtual to make it easier for people to attend. Langley said that would lead to more participation. Ali Tobey from BerryDunn then said that these policies came out of State requirements, current City and County plans, and incorporated feedback from the public and City Staff. Member Turner asked for clarification on whether or not members can discuss Committee business outside of the meetings. Williams said that they cannot meet with three or more members present, but two members can have a conversation amongst themselves. Turner asked if he would be allowed to meet with the member who is running the subcommittee with him to prepare ahead of time. Langley said that there is nothing wrong with that sort of meeting and preparing in advance of the subcommittee should be encouraged. Member Witham asked when they should start looking at dates. Williams said that they would schedule them at the end of March and beginning of April. Ouellette pointed out that there will be two subcommittees that are only run by one Committee member since one member is no longer on the Committee. The Committee agreed that would be acceptable and those subcommittees can be run by one member.

7.) Public Comments

Chair Langley opened the public hearing at 6:21PM. There were no members of the public in attendance who wished to speak. Langley closed the public hearing at 6:21PM.

8.) Staff Comments

City Planner Williams asked the Committee to keep an eye out for when Assistant Planner Ouellette begins to schedule the subcommittees. He said that hopefully the meetings being completely virtual will make scheduling easier. Ouellette said that once the meetings are scheduled, she will be creating some promotional material for the meetings. She asked that the Committee help get the promotional material out into the community once it is ready. She said that they City will be promoting the meetings through their channels but it is important to make sure that as many people know about the meetings as possible. Member Lyles asked if the Inventory and Analysis section of the Plan is completed. Williams said that it is mostly done and that there is some information that will be included that is not currently public knowledge. Lyles asked if there were spaces in the Inventory and Analysis which show where this information will be located. Williams said that there is not in the current draft, but he knows which sections this information will be located in.

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9.) Adjournment

Member Turner made a motion to adjourn. Member Markosian seconded the motion.

Chair Langley adjourned the meeting at 6:25PM.

**Meeting adjourned
at 6:25PM**

Minutes prepared by: Elizabeth Ouellette, Assistant City Planner.

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