

Sharon MA

Planning Board: Master Plan Initiative



Mission

The Sharon master plan is a community based effort, led by the Planning Board, to explore what the future of Sharon should look like and lay the groundwork for implementation of that vision. The Master Plan is to provide guidance, coordination and a road map for the future development/improvement for the Town of Sharon. Our community can use already completed studies on water, infrastructure, open space and recreation, housing production plan and the Post Office Square Masterplan to help establish a baseline for understanding Sharon's current state. These studies are a valuable tool for understanding how to support future needs, and can be part of answering the question of what does Sharon want to be in 10, 15 and 20 years. This type of long-term visioning occurs through a master plan process, which is a comprehensive study of the Town's future goals and conducted through a process of public engagement and input.

Process

Master Plan Steering Committee (MPSC)

The Planning Board is charged under Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 41, Section 81D to lead the master plan effort. The Board of Selectmen would appoint a Master Plan Steering Committee to oversee the development of a Comprehensive Master Plan. The committee will be composed of various elected and appointed members of town boards and select citizen stakeholders. This committee will meet under the direct oversight of the Planning Board and will report to the Planning Board on a monthly basis.

All committee members are to be a residence of Sharon and appointed to a two (2) year term. The board is to meet monthly at a regularly scheduled time. The board should consist of no more than fourteen (14) members. The town boards and committees which are required to appoint one representative include:

- Board of Selectmen
- Finance Committee
- Community Preservation Committee
- Conservation Commission
- Zoning Board
- Board of Health

- Water Management Advisory Committee
- A maximum of four (4) at large citizen stakeholders to be chosen through an interview process after publicly advertising for the positions.

All other boards and committees are welcome to submit a representative for consideration to join the board.

Resources

The MPSC will work directly with a consultant to conduct, guide, and document the master plan effort. In addition to the consultant, Town staff assistance by the town engineer & assistant engineer, GIS coordinator and clerical support may be utilized. Residents willing to volunteer their professional services will be greatly welcomed and appreciated. Also, There may be an opportunity for a student internship to help with the data surveying, collection and documentation.

The Master Plan

The master plan initiative will be composed of three main phases. Discovery, Visioning and Implementation.

Discovery: The MPSC, with the assistance of the consultant, is to review the existing Housing Production, Water Infrastructure Plan, Open Space and Recreation Plan, and Office Square Master Plan and use information from the plans as required to define current conditions. In addition to revising the existing studies, the MPSC and consultant will develop studies on a variety of topics, including socio-economic diversity; current town infrastructure including buildings & roadways; etc.

Visioning: This phase of the master plan effort requires significant community outreach and participation for it to be successful. The board, with the assistance of the consultant, will build community interest and involvement by:

- Interface with community stakeholders through open public meetings, online surveys, interaction at community events, comment sessions, etc.
- Follow up charrettes to review & develop particular topics identified during the public outreach forums
- Solicit advice & recommendations from town boards and committees
- Build consensus and promote awareness & value

Implementation: The MPSC will evaluate the information gathered during the visioning sessions to determine a common interest and direction for the town. The board and consultant, will develop a timeline of key milestone dates which list out the action items

and recommendations required for the various Town committees to meet the approved goals. Once a well-developed plan is created, a warrant article will be proposed to both present and seek approval of the master plan at Town Meeting.

Funding

The MPSC, sponsored by the Planning Board, will submit a capital request for fiscal year 2018 in an amount as the MPSC recommends to be spent on a consultant to develop the master plan. Since master plans are frequently a phased project, a second warrant article may be requested if additional funding is required to complete the study.

Additional opportunities may be available to assist in funding particular aspects of the master plan such as the Finance Committee reserve fund and grant programs. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) offers grant related financial, planning, operations and project management services which can be applied to update the Housing Production, Water Infrastructure Plan, Open Space and Recreation Plan, and Office Square Master Plan studies.

The MPSC will post a Request for Proposal (RFP) to solicit qualification information from the master plan consultant and a fee for service. The qualifications should include years of experience with town master planning, list of services to be included and excluded, and resumes of team members.

CONCLUSION

A master plan is an excellent tool for a community to thoughtfully combine community input along with professional input to create a way forward and a vision for the future of a town that can be used for 10, 15 or 20 years. Even though a town like Sharon may not have much land remaining that is still able to be developed and much of the Town is protected as conservation lands, a master plan is still a critical and needed tool to help identify areas for future improvement and, most importantly, to preserve the aspects of the town which make Sharon such a wonderful place to live. With the benefit of both active and informed citizens and the DPW's ongoing improvement efforts, the masterplan process will help the town of Sharon realize and succeed in achieving its future goals.