

Master Plan: Visions of Where the Community Wants To Be

By Leslie Rott

As Mackinac Island works toward an updated Master Plan, the *Town Crier* asked some experts help to clarify exactly what a Master Plan is supposed to be.

A Master Plan "charts the future of the community" in terms of land use, said Andrea Brown, executive director of the Michigan Association of Planning.

"The Master Plan should really look at the community as it exists now... and look at where the community wants to be," said Pat Coleman, A.I.C.P., president of U.P. Architects and Engineers.

The first thing that should be done in the Master Plan process, they say, is to look at what a community has by doing a land use survey and then looking at future possibilities for that land in terms of population, traffic, roads, and parks.

Community outreach, Ms. Brown said, is an important factor in the Master Plan process. Minimally, a public hearing is required for the Master Plan, but most communities opt to do several workshops or surveys over a period of several months.

Goals and objectives for the future can come out of community input, which will not only help to shape the Master Plan, but also the future of the community.

Mr. Coleman suggests that several scenarios for the future be explored and once the preferred scenario is picked, the community must then figure out what to do to make that scenario

a reality.

"The community walks away and knows what it has to do," he said, which means taking a realistic look at community problems in order to solve them in the future.

Included in any Master Plan should be a land use survey, demographics, housing and economic information, streets, values of the community, goals and objectives of the community, strategies to meet the stated goals and objectives, and a future land use plan.

The purpose of an introduction, Ms. Brown said, is to discuss the importance of a Master Plan.

"It can really set the stage for the articulation of values" expressed in the rest of the plan, she said. And while a Master Plan can be geared toward outsiders, Mr. Coleman said that it should be written for people who are already members of the community.

The winter is something that many communities fail to address, Mr. Coleman said.

"We can't just plan as if we're summer all the time." His goal would be to make the community more livable, to create parks, for example, that are usable in all four seasons, instead of only two or three.

Parking and cost of sewer and water capacity are two things Ms. Brown said cities fail to consider when writing a Master Plan.

If a community is only making minimal changes to a Master Plan, the process should take

only a few months. If more substantial changes are being made, she said, it could take between one and two years to complete.

Under state law, a city's Master Plan must be reviewed and updated every five years.

Mr. Coleman said that many communities struggle with the Master Plan process and conflicting visions often impede the process further. He said that the cost of a consultant and having people internally that are qualified planners are deterrents for

some communities to look outside for help. A lot of time and effort, however, are involved in the articulation of the plan and Mr. Coleman said it is easier to review someone else's work, so a consultant can be helpful in those terms.

"It certainly can be done," Ms. Brown said of a city doing the Master Plan process "in house," without a consultant, as there are resources and publications available from the Michigan Association of Plan-

ning, but she added, "it's certainly good to have someone in charge."

A Master Plan doesn't have to be expensive, Mr. Coleman said. "It's better to have a small plan than none.

"The success of the plan," he added, "is not determined by its weight."

Essentially, Ms. Brown said, a Master Plan should say, "We see our Island as..." and the Mackinac Island community is left to fill in the blank.

Committee Discusses Plan Introduction

By Leslie Rott

Master Plan Committee members, meeting Thursday, August 3, continued their discussion about the introduction to the document and debated the intent of their work and of a master plan in general.

"The introduction basically serves as outline, theme, and plot for the rest of the essay," Chairman Mike Hart explained.

He said the committee should start thinking of its Master Plan update in terms of this question: "Is the future planning section strong enough, specific enough, or has time shown that it needs revision?"

There was some question as to how involved the committee wants to get in rewriting. Committee member Dan Wightman said he thought the goal is to update the old Master Plan, not completely change it.

"We're not restricted to the old one in any way," responded Mr.

Hart.

After discussing what the committee felt should be in the introduction at their July 27 meeting, a rough draft version was presented, including mention of special living considerations on Mackinac Island, school, employment, winter, horse culture, and challenges.

Newly appointed member Trish Martin said that if the introduction is to be an outline, there are some missing points. She suggested that historic and natural resource preservation be added to the introduction.

"It needs to be pointed out," Mr. Wightman agreed.

"Mackinac Island has always been an ongoing balance between economic development and historic preservation," Mr. Hart elaborated.

Committee member Mary Dufina said she thought all the points were good, but asked if the committee is trying to address too

much in the introduction. She proposed stressing the small amount of land that is available for development on Mackinac.

"We have 'x' amount of land that everybody wants and is worth a lot," she said.

Chairman Hart disagreed, and Ms. Martin said that she felt the introduction offered a flavor of Island life.

The committee agreed that the size of the Island in terms of acreage and a breakdown of how much that is in terms of City and State Park land would help people to further visualize future expansion issues. Other things they feel should be added includes information on the police and fire departments, Mackinac Island Medical Center, and the library.

"We are a fully functioning city," Mr. Hart emphasized.

Committee member Lorna Straus stressed her belief in always keeping the audience in

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