

July 10, 2017

Dear Members of the Concord Long Range Planning Committee, Concord Planning Division, and CivicMoxie/coUrbanize planning consultants,

I would like to reiterate and expand on some ideas I expressed during the June 9th and June 23rd meetings of the CLRPC.

Of immediate interest to me at this time are: a) Land use issues; specifically advocacy both for meeting affordable housing goals and simultaneously aiming for maximum natural preservation; b) Processing of gathered data; specifically my reservations, and their reasons, regarding the weighting of resident surveys the Town has carried out so far; c) other goals and re-phrasing some existing ones.

A) Land Use issues: The connection between affordable housing goals and natural preservation:

During the June 9th meeting of the CLRPC, I reacted to a statement made by our consultant from CivicMoxie while presenting data gathered at the May 31st public gathering, when Ms. Silberberg stated that there were a number of comments on conservation and open space, but these would be given lesser emphasis because so much had already been done in that area. I stressed that conservation was important for our town citizens, and that continued vigilance should be shown. I compared it to a similar statement made by Ms. Silberberg about school related concerns, when, in response to a committee member who pointed out that citizens were mostly happy with the schools, Ms. Silberberg stressed the importance of remaining vigilant.

During the June 23rd meeting, another member of the consulting team suggested citizens be asked whether they prefer affordable housing solutions or land conservation. I commented that it need not be either or; as an example, I mentioned a citizen petition article at the 2017 Town Meeting, where it was moved the town purchase smaller dwellings and offer them to affordable housing eligible families, the financing of which would be carried out by a fee imposed on new larger constructions. That article was of course amended into the formation of a special committee to study affordable housing solutions, a committee which is in the process of being formed by the Selectboard. Nevertheless, the point remains that affordable housing and land conservation need not be "opposites" at all, and that a third option of "other" should be added to any such survey question.

Since then, it has come to my realization, moreover, that affordable housing and land conservation not only are not opposites, but they actually go hand in hand! After all, the legal purpose of affordable housing quota compliance is to enable a town to have some control on the amount and types of development in it. Without affordable housing, not only do we miss out on all the various benefits of having a diverse and inclusive community, but our natural resources are much more at risk, too.

I therefore encourage the CLRPC not to see affordable housing and natural preservation as divergent goals, and for all our committees to keep in mind that if equal treatment and accessibility of enjoyment to all is truly what we want, then allowing all to reap the benefits of a natural environment is a good place to start.

B) Survey weighting:

Both a town wide survey in 2014 and the 2016 CLRPC survey were weighted in favor of responses from the younger age group by our town analysts, with the reasoning that proportionally too few younger

families had responded, and the weighting would provide more accurate representation. A stated assumption was that young families are busy and might not have time to respond to surveys.

I have objections to this approach on various fronts - and I will only address the current CLRCP survey(s):

1) On "assumptions": This is something I commented on during the June 9 and 23 meetings. We can not assume that older citizens are less busy. Older citizens have more health concerns, and many have more of a sense of urgency with regards to projects they want to pursue in their remaining life years. If they are taking more trouble to answer surveys, it is not because they have any more dispensible time than anyone else. More likely (granted, a counter- assumption) it is because they have acquired some experience and "wisdom" which they are eager to share.

Another counter-assumption: It is not credible that younger families don't have time to fill out a simple multiple choice survey. It is more likely that many are in fact content with life in this town, which is pretty good in many ways. (And again, that is why we need to remain vigilant to keep what is good, and that includes nature and its benefits.)

2) Leaving all assumptions behind, here are technical/scientific reasons why the survey weightings are unreliable:

a) The 2016 CLRPC survey was sent one per household. Yet its analysis includes a listing of "men" and "women" who responded. Clearly, it had to be either/or from each household (not to mention possible identifications with neither gender,) and the gender of the respondent can not be taken into any consideration.

Also, with regards to age groups, and especially now that the CLRPC is reaching out to teenagers for input, clearly some of the middle aged households had younger adults or almost adults in them as well.

One also wonders what was done with answers that did not indicate age or income of respondent. (I, for one, avoided both questions.) One also wonders if the surveys were really anonymous, or was there some coding to indicate which survey belonged to whom (since the surveys did come with a special code each, presumably to avoid duplications.)

b) Last but definitely not least: The sample of younger respondents is truly very small. (Especially if one remembers that "young men" in the census include some who are imprisoned at the correctional facility.) It is analytically not accurate and reliable to extrapolate from such a small sample what a certain age group would want. Any uncertainty that is there because of insufficient data becomes amplified - not reduced - when an added weighting based on extrapolation takes place.

Bottom line: The current approach underway of reaching out to younger families and teenagers for input is a much better way to go - as long as the questions are not leading, and as long as it is kept in mind that many teenagers may find shifts in their priorities as they grow up and take on family and other life responsibilities of their own.

C) Other thoughts:

I noticed that 'agriculture' is not specified much, for example in the teen questionnaire available at the youth services webpage. I assume it is thought to be covered under open space or land use, but agriculture is its own field (no pun) that is of significance both in the history, and, more importantly, in the continued well being and good health of this town.

Also, about the term "town character." This is a term that keeps coming up in discussions, Town Meetings, surveys, etc.

It doesn't specify much, and very much sounds like an "old timers'" term.

It is better to be specific: Smaller houses? Protected trees? Independent shops? Walkable streets?

When clarified in this way, much of these qualities (if not all) may not seem like "old timers'" issues at all!!

Closing thoughts: I write this as someone who grew up and lived in large cities all her life until moving to Concord in 2007. There is much about city life I enjoy, especially as a concert pianist and someone with interdisciplinary interests. However, while trying to bring more diversity, affordability, and culture to our town, we should not be allowing for the trend of natural destruction to seep into our planning, especially when most urban communities are struggling to find ways to revitalize nature in response to its proven climate and mental and physical health benefits.

Thank you for your consideration. Many thanks to all for their efforts.

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ps: With regards to a comment I made on June 23 that CivicMoxie "spoke for the town administration," (as opposed to the CLRPC,) I clarify again that I was referring to a statement made during June 9th meeting that any answers offered by CivicMoxie to citizen comments would be considered as "from the town" (as opposed to from the CLRPC.) The context then was that CLRPC would need to deliberate before responding to the substance of any citizen comments. Also, clearly, the consulting firm was ultimately hired by the Town Manager, upon the recommendation of a special review committee.

Otherwise, I am fully aware that CivicMoxie is not a part of the town administration per se :-)

What matters ultimately is that the CLRPC guides the consulting firm, based on citizen input and the committee's deliberations, and I have confidence that both CLRPC chairpersons intend to honor and exercise this responsibility and privilege.