

CITY OF FRAMINGHAM
STRATEGIC INITIATIVES AND
FINANCIAL OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

RECOMMENDATION FOR ACTION ON LONG RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN

NOVEMBER 2022

To

Charlie Sisitsky Mayor of the City of Framingham 150 Concord Street Framingham, MA 01702 mayor@framinghamma.gov	Philip R. Ottaviani, Jr. Chair, Framingham Council 150 Concord Street Framingham, MA 01702 citycouncil@framinghamma.gov	Priscila Sousa, Chair School Committee Farley Building 19 Flagg Drive Framingham, MA 01702 School_committee@framingham.k12.ma.us
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Article IV, section 11 of the Home Rule Charter for the City of Framingham states that there shall be a Strategic Initiatives and Financial Oversight Committee (SIFOC) to advise the Mayor, Framingham Council, and School Committee on the status of Framingham’s long range strategic plan in accordance with Article III of the Charter, section 11(b), the state of the municipal economy, sufficiency of municipal revenues, and other fiscal matters that may from time to time be referred to it by the Mayor, Framingham Council, or School Committee.

Pursuant to this mandate, SIFOC hereby recommends that the government take action on the City’s Long Range Strategic Plan.

A. Strategic Planning.

1. Master Plan

Article III, § 11 of the Charter calls for a Master Plan. The Master Plan “shall be a statement, through text, maps, illustrations or other forms of communication, that is designed to provide a basis for decision making regarding the long-term physical development of [the City of Framingham.]” G.L. ch. 42 § 81D. At a minimum, the Master Plan must contain the elements described in Mass. G.L. ch. 41 § 81D. Those elements are:

1. Goals and policies statement which identifies the goals and policies of the municipality for its future growth and development. Each community shall conduct an interactive public process, to determine community values, goals and to identify patterns of development that will be consistent with these goals.

2. Land use plan element which identifies present land use and designates the proposed distribution, location and inter-relationship of public and private land uses. This element shall relate the proposed standards of population density and building intensity to the capacity of land available or planned facilities and services. A land use plan map illustrating the land use policies of the municipality shall be included.
3. Housing element which identifies and analyzes existing and forecasted housing needs and objectives including programs for the preservation, improvement and development of housing. This element shall identify policies and strategies to provide a balance of local housing opportunities for all citizens.
4. Economic development element which identifies policies and strategies for the expansion or stabilization of the local economic base and the promotion of employment opportunities.
5. Natural and cultural resources element which provides an inventory of the significant natural, cultural and historic resource areas of the municipality, and policies and strategies for the protection and management of such areas.
6. Open space and recreation element which provides an inventory of recreational and resources and open space areas of the municipality, and policies and strategies for the management and protection of such resources and areas.
7. Services and facilities element which identifies and analyzes existing and forecasted needs for facilities and services used by the public.
8. Circulation element which provides an inventory of existing and proposed circulation and transportation systems.
9. Implementation program element which defines and schedules the specific municipal actions necessary to achieve the objectives of each element of the master or study plan. Scheduled expansion or replacement of public facilities or circulation system components and the anticipated costs and revenues associated with accomplishment of such activities shall be detailed in this element. This element shall specify the process by which the municipality's regulatory structures shall be amended so as to be consistent with the master plan.

The planning board is responsible for developing the Master Plan. The Mayor shall then submit the Master Plan to the Framingham Council for adoption, with or without amendments. *See* Charter, Art. III § 11(a)(ii). The current Master Plan is available at <https://www.framinghamma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/42437/Framingham-2020-Master-Land-Use-Plan-Update-FINAL>.

Upon taking office, a newly elected mayor shall review the Master Plan to determine if revisions, amendments, and/or additions are necessary and present such proposals to the planning board for deliberation and approval. *See id.* § 11(a)(iii).

2. Long Range Strategic Plan

Article III, § 11 of the Charter calls for a Long Range Strategic Plan (the “Strategic Plan”). The Mayor shall prepare the Strategic Plan every 10 years in the year ending in “0.” *See* Charter, Art. III § 11(b)(i). The Strategic Plan “shall address financial, service, and infrastructure needs of the municipality and shall be coordinated with the findings and recommendations of any master plan then in effect.” *See id.*

The Strategic Plan is to be **updated every 2 years** in consultation with SIFOC, division and department heads, multiple member bodies of the municipality, the council, school committee and residents. *See id.*

In December 2019, SIFOC issued the Public Comment Report attached hereto as **Exhibit A**. This Report identified 9 issues for consideration in connection with strategic planning: (1) economic development; (2) transportation/traffic; (3) municipal (capital planning and funding of retirement obligations); (4) education; (5) housing/affordability; (6) art/culture/recreation; (7) environment; (8) financial (budgeting and debt service); and (9) opportunities.

On December 30, 2020, the Mayor’s office submitted the Strategic Plan 1.0 for the City of Framingham to the Council.¹ The Strategic Plan is available at <https://www.framinghamma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/40772/2020-12-30-Framingham-Strategic-Plan>.

The Plan identifies “Five Pillars,” core priorities that support the Mayor’s approach to effective governance. They are: (1) a smooth transition to a city form of government; (2) excellence in education and schools; (3) invigorating our economy; (4) investing in people; and (5) preservation of assets, resources, and quality of life.

The Plan identifies the following “goals” or categories of interest: (1) conservation and environmental protection; (2) diversity, equity, and inclusion; (3) economic development and housing; (4) civic engagement; (5) maintenance of City facilities and infrastructure; (6) finances; (7) health; (8) performance; (9) public safety; (10) recreation, history and culture; (11) transportation; and (12) workforce. Each of these goals include a list of objectives, which range from the aspirational to the concrete.

The current Strategic Plan contemplates an “implementation plan” that will “identify those objectives under each of the goal statements to be prioritized and worked on” in the 2 year period for

¹ The Strategic Plan states that “SIFOC’s input was incorporated into the crafting of the plan.” *See* Strategic Plan, p. 12. SIFOC respectfully disputes this characterization of its role in the process of developing the current Strategic Plan. It received a first draft of the Strategic Plan on December 7, 2020, within hours of its final scheduled meeting of the year. SIFOC did not have the opportunity to meaningfully review and consult with the Mayor’s Office on the Strategic Plan.

updating the Strategic Plan. *See* Strategic Plan, p. 26. Once the objectives are identified, “the tasks and measurement indicators for success will be determined for each of the objectives.” *See id.*

The Mayor’s Office was to produce the implementation plan in June 2021. No later than January 2022, the Mayor’s Office was to provide a progress report to SIFOC and the public, describing the progress that the City had made on the objectives outlined in the Implementation Plan.² *See id.*

The implementation plan and progress report were to aid the Mayor’s Office and SIFOC in developing “Strategic Plan 2.0” in December 2022. *See id.*

B. Recommendation for Action.

As of the date of this statement, SIFOC has been unable to confirm whether the Framingham Council ever voted to adopt the Strategic Plan from December 2020.

The Strategic Plan needs specific objectives and action items to ground its goals. The City may want to identify milestones and other key performance indicators against which to measure the City’s progress in accomplishing such objectives.

SIFOC recommends that the Mayor’s Office take action in the near future to update the Strategic Plan. In addition, SIFOC recommends that the Mayor’s Office review the Master Plan, determine if revisions, amendments, and/or additions are necessary, and ensure that the Strategic Plan aligns with the Master Plan. SIFOC understands that the Mayor’s Office is currently undertaking this action and welcomes the opportunity to participate in updating the Strategic Plan.

Respectfully submitted,

David A. Mawhinney
Chair, Strategic Initiatives and
Financial Oversight Committee

Members:

- David A. Mawhinney, Chair
- Mary Kate Feeney, Vice Chair
- James Culhane, CFA
- Christian Estrella
- Joel Francis
- Bill McCarthy
- LeRoy Watkins

² The report would be based, in part, on division head progress reports delivered to the Mayor in December 2021.

Exhibit A

SIFOC Public Comment Report (December 2019)

Strategic Initiatives and Financial Oversight Committee

Public Comment Report

December 2019

Members:

Robert Case, Chair
Mary Kate Feeney, Vice Chair
Darlene Umina, Clerk
Mahmood M. Akhtar, P.E.
James Culhane, CFA
Gerard E. Desilets, JD
Joel Francis
Michael G. Gatlin, JD
David Kiklis

Since our first meeting in May 2019, SIFOC has welcomed comment from elected officials, the Superintendent of Framingham Public Schools and residents through our scheduled meetings as well as two public hearings on September 23 and October 7. During that time, we have heard thoughts ideas and opinions on many issues in our community. We have collected what seem to be the most pressing issues to our city at this time again as generated from the public.

We submit this to the Mayor, as well as Council and School Committee, to supplement the Mayor's Office drafting of the strategic plan in 2020, as outlined in the Home Rule Charter.

1. Economic Development

The most common thread from all constituencies has been status of economic development in Framingham. There is concern that Framingham is not doing enough on this topic to generate revenue in order to have the resources that Framingham needs for schools, public works and general quality of life without further raising residential taxes.

Issues include:

- Attracting new businesses to Framingham & encouraging the growth of current businesses in Framingham
- Launching a specific marketing campaign on why businesses should be attracted to Framingham while we are in competition with other commonwealth towns and cities.
- Clear plan on how to revitalize blighted and empty shopping plazas
- Addressing public safety concerns Downtown with loitering, drug issues, violence, etc. to help sustain the commerce we are seeing there.
- A clear plan for the increase in shift in e-commerce and potential loss of rented retail space/commercial tax income.

2. Transportation/Traffic

Traffic and transportation touch every aspect of quality of life in Framingham. It is causing frustration and anger amongst residents and it can be seen as a deterrent for businesses and potential residents coming into Framingham.

Issues include:

- Comprehensive city-wide traffic study needs to be conducted with a timeline of deliverables to improve quality of life as well as address safety concerns and alleviate some school bussing pressure.
- Public Transportation will change substantially in the next decade. How will Framingham adapt to these changes, we need to think big about how we can

better move people around our city, i.e.: Expanding MWRTA, increase bus service to Boston, expanding bike paths/embracing safe streets program, may include working with CSX to maximize possibilities.

- Address concerns about Downtown/Commuter Rail parking (CSX space, Pearl street garage, Danforth Building)

3. Municipal

We have heard from several counselors shedding light on Framingham's pension and healthcare liabilities for its retirees and employees, infrastructure planning and overall budget staffing concerns.

Issues include:

- Regarding pensions & healthcare, how will we financially maintain our promise to our past and present city employees, while fulfilling our statutory requirements.
- Addressing plans to pay off debt, including water infrastructure costs while continuing to pay for infrastructure investments.
- Review Blue Ribbon Commission report, evaluate the status of municipal buildings and develop a plan on each building's use and future.
- How can we best streamline government & school divisions to mitigate the duplicate areas.

4. Education

We have heard from parents, the superintendent, the school committee as well as the general public and see the focus as continuing to address inequities, bussing, and overall school performance.

Issues Include:

- Plan for the expansion of high-quality early education for all students
- Plan for the future of elementary schools community-wide
- Address concerns about bussing

5. Housing/Affordability

Framingham's housing concerns are diverse in that we need to consider apartment planning, senior housing, housing stock for the varying generations and retaining our current residents by offering more options. The city needs to take a close look at the

increasing water and sewer rates, and tax split affecting commercial and residential properties.

- Develop a housing strategy for the city taking into account the impact apartments will have on our schools, traffic, public services and overall quality of life in our city. Explore the possibility of converting some city buildings/old schools into affordable condos.
- Review zoning and planning by-laws.
- Review Residential vs. commercial tax rate. Look deeply into the option of residential tax exemption and the ramifications it would have on our current residents as well as review water/sewer rates

6. Art/Culture/Recreation

Framingham is home to many vibrant art and culture organizations, museums, and parks and open spaces. While we are fortunate to have these assets, Framingham needs to do more to bring groups together, maintain and expand the spaces we have and expand quality of life opportunities.

- Expand and maintain recreational spaces and parks, including updating Mary Dennison Park, build a splash pad or public pool, dog parks and update neighborhood parks.
- Explore uses for municipal buildings, such as Nevins Hall, for the arts, like an orchestra in residence or public art displays.
- Investigate the potential of adopting the Community Preservation Act, in order for Framingham to have dedicated funding for such projects that preserve and improve our open spaces.

7. Environment

Framingham has a dedicated interest in not only our footprint here in Framingham but our effect on the globe. We have several opportunities for improvement here.

Issues Include:

- Explore the opportunities for solar in our municipal buildings, parking lots and open spaces.
- Addressing environmental justice sites, especially below Route 135.

Issues Include:

- Explore the opportunities for solar in/on our municipal buildings, parking lots and open spaces, including school roof facilities.
- Addressing environmental justice sites, especially below Route 135.

- How to better manage our recycling programs within Framingham and the costs associated

8. Financial

Framingham should review its debt & financial policies to ensure maximum financial flexibility for its operations.

- Town to prepare rolling 4 year financial plan/ budgets (OK to show deficits in “out” years)
- Budgeting to include “true” cost of Pensions & Post-retirement costs by individual member & (calculated [at a minimum] to not increase the City’s liability.)
- Review ability to issue Water & Sewer Revenue debt (to finance W&S projects and provide financial flexibility for General Obligation Debt.
- Review ability to issue Lease/Appropriation Debt.

9. Opportunities

Framingham is home to several major corporations. Strategic partnerships with these firms offer opportunities to benefit The companies have often contributed to local schools and events, but coordinated city led partnership(s) have not been created or maintained. The city has the ability to offer incentives, publicity and in return receive expertise or services.

- Dedicate resources to programmatically pursue partnerships at an executive level
- Create proposals where all parties benefit
- Create a leadership council with CEO representatives from Ameresco, TJX, Cumberland Farms, Bose, Staples IDC etc.