

## **The History and Mission of the Downtown Initiative Steering Committee (DISC)**

From Norman Khumalo, Town Manager

In May 2010, Town Meeting voted to spend \$400,000 for engineering to develop a plan to improve streetscape and infrastructure in our downtown. In April 2010 MassDOT's Project Review Committee determined the project was eligible for federal funding through Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization's (MPO) Annual Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) at an estimated cost of \$4 million. MassDOT's determination was not a commitment of state or federal funding only that the project could be included as an eligible project in the TIP. Final commitment for funding requires approval of the project through the MPO which is the federally designated entity charged with developing transportation plans and programs. MPO is comprised of members including MassDOT, Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), MBTA, MBTA Advisory Board, MassPort, the City of Boston and six other municipalities. Under the TIP, funds are designated for the construction of roadway improvements but require the community to fund and administer the design with MassDOT-Highway Division review and approval.

The Town subsequently retained BETA Group (BETA), to develop the design of the project including the roadway improvements that would be covered by any TIP funding. The Town additionally established the Downtown Initiative Steering Committee (DISC) whose primary function is to participate as advisors to the Town Manager in the planning and implementation of the Downtown Initiative project.

DISC was originally comprised of six members selected by the town manager to represent residents and downtown business and property owners. The group scheduled and posted regular public meetings with BETA to evaluate a broad range of potential improvements to traffic flow, pedestrian safety, parking, drainage, and visual enhancements to the downtown.

BETA and the Town evaluated numerous options and the effects of these options in an effort to make the first submission to MassDOT for review at the 25% design level. Because of the interaction and interdependences among issues, the most appropriate solutions are not often clear-cut. For example, improving traffic flow may decrease available parking, and the presence or absence of a bike lane may affect the willingness of the state DOT to rank the project higher or lower in the funding queue. DISC, town staff, and BETA, with input from businesses and townspeople, have been working together to address these complex trade-offs.

DISC now is in the process of finalizing its recommendations with regard to the downtown streetscape and infrastructure. DISC also has the task of providing information to the town, so that townspeople can continue to evaluate options. Public input is sought and can be provided to the town engineer. The town engineer is also planning on providing time for residents to review the plans. More information is available on the DISC space on the Town of Hopkinton's website.