

AMHERST PLANNING BOARD
Wednesday, June 6, 2018, 7:00 PM
Town Room, Town Hall
MINUTES

PRESENT: Stephen Schreiber, Chair, Greg Stutsman, Robert Crouner, Michael Birtwistle, and Jack Jemsek

ABSENT: Maria Chao, Christine Gray-Mullen, Pari Riahi, and David Levenstein

STAFF: Christine Brestrup, Planning Director
Alan Snow, Tree Warden
Steven McCarthy, Administrative Assistant

Mr. Schreiber opened the meeting at 7:03 PM.

I. MINUTES – April 4, 2018 and May 2, 2018

Mr. Birtwistle MOVED to approve the Minutes of April 4, 2018. Mr. Stutsman seconded. The vote was 5-0. The motion passed.

Mr. Birtwistle MOVED to approve the Minutes of May 2, 2018. Mr. Stutsman seconded. The vote was 4-0-1 (Schreiber abstained). The motion passed.

II. SCENIC ROADS – JOINT PUBLIC HEARING WITH TREE WARDEN

Scenic Road tree removal to allow construction and drainage work in West Bay Road from town line to Gould Way

Public Shade Trees impacted by this project include the following trees (Sizes indicate “diameter at breast height” – DBH):

10” Norway Maple

18” Red Maple

20” Black Birch

18” Red Oak

7” Red Oak

20” Red Oak

12” Pin Oak

10” Pin Oak

Mr. Schreiber read the preamble and described the trees to be removed.

Alan Snow, Tree Warden, described the proposal. The DPW road improvement project that will necessitate the removal of these trees will take place on Bay Road from the Hadley town line to Gould Way, and is intended to fix some drainage problems, flatten the road a bit, make it straighter, and make it more bike and pedestrian friendly. The road will be widened, and striping will be improved on the uphill side so there will be a bike lane and more room for pedestrians. The trees will not be directly impacted by the road, but by the drainage swale on the south side of the road. He noted he had misidentified the Norway Maple; it is actually an ash tree.

Mr. Crowner reported on the site visit. There are a lot of trees along the southern edge of Bay Road, especially west of Spencer Drive; only a fraction are proposed to be removed, and many, though not all, of the trees proposed to be removed did not look very healthy.

Henry Lappen, chair of the Amherst Public Shade Tree Committee, described the opinion of the Committee on this project; they feel it is for the good of the community, and the trees must come down. He asked that this project, and other projects, be used to fund other trees.

Mr. Crowner asked if the project included replacing the trees.

Mr. Snow said that this project would not be used to fund new tree plantings. There is still money in the tree planting fund, so any trees to be planted would come from that fund.

Mr. Stutsman asked if there was any precedent for the Town moving funds around for tree plantings after Town projects that fell trees.

Mr. Snow said that the DPW would request tree replacement in future projects.

Mr. Crowner said the trees probably wouldn't be missed; the canopy of other trees will also be trimmed back from the road.

Mr. Snow added the DPW would be raising the canopy to maintain proper road clearance; the trees have grown into the road over the time.

There was no public comment.

Mr. Stutsman MOVED to approve the removal of the trees and close the public hearing. Mr. Birtwistle seconded. The vote was 5-0. The motion passed.

Mr. Snow was in favor of removal.

III. PLANNING & ZONING

A. ZSC Report

The ZSC has begun discussion on a work plan that they will submit to the new Town Council when they are seated regarding potential zoning initiatives they might take.

There was no public comment.

IV. TOWN MEETING

A. Debrief after Annual Town Meeting

Mr. Crowner said the ZSC was very pleased that the Inclusionary Zoning article had passed.

B. Topics not reasonably anticipated 48 hours prior to the meeting - none

V. OLD BUSINESS

A. Signing of Decisions – SPR-C-2018-12, Paul Cole – Applebrook Subdivision, and SPR 2018-13, SPR 2018-14, SPP 2018-02 – All About Learning

B. Topics not reasonably anticipated 48 hours prior to the meeting - none

VI. NEW BUSINESS

A. Amir Mikhchi – 133-143 South East Street – informal review of proposed mixed-use building – 48 dwelling units & 6 retail units

Mike Liu of the Berkshire Design Group presented the presentation. He clarified that this is not a formal application, just an informal review of the project plans before a formal application is submitted. Ms. Brestrup noted the project would come to the Planning Board for Site Plan Review and potentially Special Permit-Planning approval. The proposal is for a mixed use building with approximately 48 residential units and some retail units on the first floor. The building is currently proposed to be ~14,000 sq. ft. and lot coverage will be around 69%. The applicant will likely request a zero setback on the north and east lot lines. South East Street has a very large right of way at this location; there is a very large green, grassy area of ROW in front of the property. Apartments will be small. The site has high groundwater and there is an isolated wetland within the site, so some ground raising and replication will be necessary. Mr. Liu asked for suggestions from the Board.

Ms. Brestrup noted that the reason the presenters were here was to gauge the Planning Board's view of the setback issues. Ms. Brestrup noted the Building Commissioner was concerned about footings that may encroach on town ROW or abutting properties – that issue may require the building to be pulled back a bit. The grading plan also showed grading on the Town ROW (which is part of the

East Common) and considered wetlands replication on the ROW, which the Assistant Town Manager thought would likely be problematic.

Mr. Schreiber noted there are zero setbacks allowed elsewhere in town, and it has been made to work.

Mr. Liu agreed that pulling the footprint back may be a good idea, and the grading must be done to ensure drainage. The grading on the common would be intended to have a smooth transition from the grading on the lot.

There was discussion about the feasibility of building zero setback buildings, and experience at 1 East Pleasant Street and Kendrick Place.

Mr. Stutsman said he was comfortable with zero setbacks as long as there was no encroachment on the Town Common.

Mr. Mikhchi arrived, and apologized for being late. He noted he didn't know the lawn in front of the homes was town property when he bought them, but is okay with it. He has been doing lawn mowing and maintenance on the Town land.

Mr. Schreiber thought it would be a good idea to move the sidewalk 'inboard' on the common, which could increase pedestrian safety, show that the lawn is public property, and it could be along the building edge – allowing easy access to the retail units.

Mr. Jemsek wondered if it would be possible to use the common area for parking and use the wetland as a natural stormwater depository.

Ms. Brestrup noted that situating parking behind buildings is important in making a functional, vibrant village center, and the Town has looked into putting parallel parking on the street, which would be a welcome development.

There was discussion about the north setback, and what the opinion of the abutter would be. Nobody has yet spoken to Florence Savings Bank, which is the property owner to the north.

Mr. Jemsek noted that there are only utility doors on the back of the Florence Savings Bank building, and there is no viewshed in that direction.

Ms. Brestrup thought it would be the Planning Department and the Select Board's preference for a sidewalk to be put in along the edge of the building while minimizing the grading change which could make the common less usable.

Mr. Liu noted that the building is proposed to have its floor level about five feet higher than the grade of the common.

Mr. Schreiber opened the floor to public comment.

Dorothy Pam asked about the residential units – can people have a chair, sit outside, or have any access to green space? Many people like to sit down when they get out of work. Mr. Mikhchi said that residents could sit in the common and socialize, and there could be some room for seating on the inside of the building ‘L’.

Mr. Birtwistle asked what the access to each retail area would be. Mr. Mikhchi said that the architectural design was a work in progress. He asked how large the residential units would be – they would be 650 square feet.

Mr. Crouner thought there should be access to the retail off South East Street – it is hard to imagine viable retail with its back turned to the street. He said he was fine with cutting back on parking.

Mr. Birtwistle asked what the square footage of the retail would be – after some discussion, Mr. Mikhchi said there would be modular retail space, so business owners could rent as much as they needed, and some space may be used for a laundromat operated by Mr. Mikhchi.

Ms. Pam asked if this would be considered affordable housing. If not, who would live there? Mr. Mikhchi said his target demographic was adjunct professors and other young professionals looking for a small, clean, nice place to live.

Mr. Mikhchi thanked the Board for their feedback, and said to expect a formal application soon.

B. Topics not reasonably anticipated 48 hours prior to the meeting

Ms. Brestrup asked the Board to sign the SUB 2018-01 plans again due to a sequencing error.

VII. FORM A (ANR) SUBDIVISION APPLICATIONS

The Board signed ANR 2018-14, relating to property off University Drive, and ANR 2018-15, relating to property off Leverett Road.

VIII. UPCOMING ZBA APPLICATIONS – ZBA 2018-34, an application for a conversion from an owner-occupied to a non-owner-occupied duplex at 21 Kendrick Place.

IX. UPCOMING SPP/SPR/SUB APPLICATIONS – SPP 2018-03, an application for an oversized sign in the R-N zone for Simple Gifts Farm at 1089 North Pleasant Street.

X. PLANNING BOARD COMMITTEE & LIAISON REPORTS – none

XI. REPORT OF THE CHAIR

There was a meeting being held at the Jones Library at the same time as the Planning Board meeting to bring together both sides of the charter debate – it may be worth stopping by.

XII. REPORT OF STAFF - none

XIII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:20 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Approved:

Steven McCarthy
Administrative Assistant

Stephen Schreiber
Chair

DATE: _____