

**AMHERST PLANNING BOARD**  
**Wednesday, October 3, 2018, 7:00 PM**  
**Town Room, Town Hall**  
**MINUTES**

**PRESENT:** Stephen Schreiber, Chair, Robert Crowner, Greg Stutsman, Maria Chao, Michael Birtwistle, Christine Gray-Mullen, and David Levenstein

**ABSENT:** Jack Jemsek and Pari Riahi

**STAFF:** Christine Brestrup, Planning Director

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Mr. Schreiber opened the meeting at 7:00 PM.

**I. MINUTES**

Mr. Birtwistle MOVED to approve the Minutes of August 29, 2018. Ms. Chao seconded.

Mr. Birtwistle thanked Ms. Brestrup for the careful recounting of his concerns regarding the 26 Spring Street project and stated that they were well-interpreted.

The vote was 7-0-0

**II. PLANNING & ZONING**

**A.** ZSC Report – Mr. Crowner reported that the ZSC is compiling a list of zoning topics, amendments and fixes for the new Town Council members. The ZSC would like this information to be in the form of a report from the Planning Board, not just from the ZSC. The Planning Department staff is also compiling a list of issues. This material is being presented in the form of a chart from the ZSC and a list from the Planning Department staff. Mr. Crowner reported on the presentation by Carolyn Misch, from the Northampton Planning Department, about how Northampton handles zoning issues. The point was to learn from Northampton about how our process might change once we change our form of government. We learned a lot. The Planning Board in Northampton doesn't have a standing zoning subcommittee. Many or most zoning initiatives come from staff. The Planning Board holds a public hearing before the City Council votes on an amendment. Staff in Northampton works from a list or framework for zoning amendments based on the Sustainable Northampton Comprehensive Plan. After the Comprehensive Plan was adopted an ad hoc committee was formed to develop a list of zoning issues from the Comprehensive Plan that needed to be addressed. Since then the staff has worked through the list. They don't bring amendments to the Council at a particular time of year. The staff has the flexibility to change language of a zoning amendment depending on how the Planning Board or Town Council responds. The staff brings things to the Council when they are ready and they bring a few amendments at a time.

Mr. Crowner suggested that the Planning Board have a discussion about how the Planning Board members would like to pursue zoning amendments with the Council.

The town will need to continue to plan and to make zoning changes. The ZSC has started to develop the report and to look at the chart. The ZSC wants to keep its focus on the big picture. He explained the chart of zoning amendment priorities.

Ms. Gray-Mullen suggested adding a note to the chart to indicate whether items were short, medium or long-term goals.

Mr. Crowner noted that there would be a text to accompany the chart to explain what it all means.

Mr. Crowner noted that, in addition to the chart, staff has compiled a list that is more detailed and specific about needed zoning changes. The ZSC and staff plan to categorize and prioritize both lists.

He asked the Planning Board members for their reaction and stated that the goal is to have something ready for the Town Council within the first few months.

Mr. Schreiber stated that two “holdovers”, Steve Schreiber and Rob Crowner, will be going off the Planning Board. He further noted that Town Council itself can propose zoning bylaw changes.

Mr. Crowner reported that a Council member may write his or her own zoning proposal, as has sometimes been done in Northampton.

Ms. Chao stated that she has reviewed a series of staff reports, encompassing a huge list of potential zoning amendments. The reports represent decades of work.

Board members began to list topics. One topic is the number of occupants per “family” in one dwelling unit. Another has been parking. There has been talk about a centralized parking fund. In lieu of providing on-site parking, developers would be able to pay into a fund.

Ms. Brestrup noted that the Downtown Parking Working Group is continuing to work on parking issues.

Ms. Gray-Mullen, a member of the DPWG, stated that they expect to have a parking consultant under contract in the next 1 to 2 months. Parking should be added to the list or chart as an issue for the Village Centers as well as for Downtown Amherst.

Mr. Schreiber reported that his architecture students are doing work on a part of downtown. Most of the land use behind the buildings was devoted to horses, liveries and blacksmith shops in the earlier times. Then downtown became dominated by automobiles, with car dealerships and a motel. We need to project ahead to what comes next.

Ms. Gray-Mullen suggested requiring drop-off and pick-up zones for shared rides.

The Board members discussed the chart and list. There was discussion about FAR (floor area ratio) and pocket neighborhoods (small houses on small lots and sometimes multiple houses sharing the same lot with a single parking area and driveway). There was discussion about how pocket neighborhoods differ from cluster subdivisions. Mr. Birtwistle suggested prioritizing pocket neighborhoods, townhouses in more zoning districts and small houses on small lots as a higher priority on the chart (“put them in the blue area” of the chart).

There was discussion about 40R districts, tiny houses and mobile homes. Ms. Chao noted that tiny houses are allowed in Vermont.

Mr. Stutsman stated that this is a work in progress and the goal is to have something to send to the Town Council in February.

Mr. Schreiber suggested expanding the use of graphics and referred the Board members and staff to the Buffalo, New York, Zoning Code. Northampton uses diagrams in its Zoning Code and is also a good example.

Mr. Birtwistle encouraged the ZSC to think about comprehensiveness and present smaller issues to the Council under one large scale comprehensive heading, such as “farm-related issues”.

- B.** Zoning Priorities – Recommendations to Town Council – see above
- C.** Public Comment – Cathy Schoen, a candidate for Town Council, introduced herself and stated that she had been sitting in on earlier meetings of the ZSC. She has an interest in zoning issues.
- D.** Other – none

### **III. OLD BUSINESS**

Topics not reasonably anticipated 48 hours prior to the meeting – none

### **IV. NEW BUSINESS**

Topics not reasonably anticipated 48 hours prior to the meeting

Mr. Schreiber announced that the Amherst Education Foundation would be holding a Trivia Bee on Thursday, October 25. It is a fund-raiser for AEF. Mr. Schreiber, Mr. Crowner, Ms. Chao and Ms. Brestrup volunteered to be on the Planning Board team.

### **V. FORM A (ANR) SUBDIVISION APPLICATIONS – none**

### **VI. UPCOMING ZBA APPLICATIONS – none**

### **VII. UPCOMING SPP/SPR/SUB APPLICATIONS – The owners of 236 North Pleasant Street and 12 Hallock Street will be returning to the Planning Board for a new Site Plan Review approval and to renew its Special Permit for an office building at the corner of North Pleasant and Hallock Streets.**

### **VIII. PLANNING BOARD COMMITTEE & LIAISON REPORTS**

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission – Jack Jemsek and Christine Gray-Mullen – The PVPC will meet “next Thursday” [October 11<sup>th</sup>].

Community Preservation Act Committee – vacant – Christine Gray-Mullen and Rob Crowner expressed an interest in serving on this committee and asked when they met.

Agricultural Commission – Stephen Schreiber – The Agricultural Commission has not met.

Design Review Board – Michael Birtwistle – No report; the Design Review Board was hoping to meet with the Planning Board at a future meeting to discuss the DRB’s role in project review.

Amherst Municipal Affordable Housing Trust – Greg Stutsman – the AMAHT will meet “next Thursday” [October 11<sup>th</sup>].

Zoning Subcommittee – Rob Crowner, Greg Stutsman and Maria Chao – report previously given

UTAC (University and Town of Amherst Collaborative) – Greg Stutsman and Christine Gray-Mullen  
Downtown Parking Working Group – Christine Gray-Mullen – UTAC has not met recently.

- IX. REPORT OF THE CHAIR** – Mr. Schreiber reported that the annual Planning Board bike ride was held on Wednesday, September 26<sup>th</sup>. There may be an annual Planning Board potluck dinner scheduled for some time in mid-November.

Mr. Schreiber further reported that there is a new exhibit at the Design Building at UMass, which is titled Observation Megacorp. It is the work of a New England architect who grew up in Connecticut in the town where Mohegan Sun was developed. It represents his observation about what happens to a town when a mega corporation of some sort establishes itself in the middle of a small New England town. What happens to the town? What happens to all the single-family houses? And other intriguing questions. Mr. Schreiber encouraged Board members to view the exhibit.

- X. REPORT OF STAFF** – Ms. Brestrup noted that UMass had made some progress with its P3 (Public Private Partnership) projects. UMass has expressed interest in developing up to 1,000 beds of student housing on its property along Massachusetts Avenue, in the vicinity of the parking lots and the Visitor Center. UMass would also like to redevelop North Village, a housing development for married grad students, on North Pleasant Street. They will probably be sending out RFP's for these projects in the coming months. She noted that the town will be encouraging UMass to interact with the town as they move forward with their project and allow town staff and the public to know what is going on and to have a chance to comment. Anything that is not within 50 feet of the border of the Educational Zoning District is not covered by zoning, so the town does not have much say over what goes on there.

**XI. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:17 PM.

Respectfully submitted:                      Approved:

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Christine Brestrup  
Planning Director

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Stephen Schreiber, Chair

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_