

**AMHERST REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
MINUTES
January 8, 2020**

LOCATION: Second Floor Conference Room/Library, Town Hall
MEMBERS PRESENT: James Turner, Chair, Jeff Lee, and Paige Wilder
ABSENT: Aaron Hayden
OTHERS PRESENT: Pam Rooney, Bob Greeney
STAFF PRESENT: Christine Brestrup, Planning Director
Dave Ziomek, Assistant Town Manager

Mr. Turner called the meeting to order at 4:35 p.m.

1. Minutes

Minutes of September 4 and December 13, 2019 were presented. There was no motion to approve or discussion due to the members' interest in hearing from the Assistant Town Manager, Dave Ziomek. ARA will review the 9/4/19 and 12/13/19 minutes at the next meeting.

2. Public Comment Period

There was no public comment.

3. Announcements – none

4. Discussion with David Ziomek, Assistant Town Manager, Regarding Potential ARA Sites and Projects

Members noted that two positions on the ARA are or will soon be vacant. Pam Rooney's position expired in June 2019 and she has not been reappointed, although she is interested. So her position is vacant. Aaron Hayden's appointment will expire in June 2020.

Mr. Ziomek stated that he would meet with the Town Manager to discuss the role and membership of the ARA. Ms. Rooney was encouraged to fill out a CAF form.

Mr. Ziomek noted that he was aware that the ARA had been meeting to figure out how the ARA can help the town. The ARA has talked about recent developments, including height of buildings, architecture and affordability.

Mr. Ziomek reported that the town will be updating the Master Plan. The Planning Board will be coordinating this effort with the CRC (Community Resources Committee) of the Town Council. We need to include references to climate change and sustainability, net zero energy building and carbon sequestration, among other things. The Planning Board and CRC will be focusing on the "necessary and obvious" when considering updates.

Mr. Ziomek also reported that the town will be taking a comprehensive look at the Zoning Bylaw, which is a product of "accretion" over time.

Ms. Brestrup reported that the existing Master Plan is the product of a 5-year process that began in 2005.

Mr. Turner asked how the ARA might be helpful in either of these processes. He asked about the agreement with UMass. He also asked about the status of UTAC and about UMass' plans for housing development along Massachusetts Avenue.

Mr. Ziomek reported that the town is in the middle of negotiations with UMass over the Strategic Partnership Agreement. The last one was signed in the fall of 2015, and it focused on communication, planning and the cost of doing business – water, fire and EMS response, etc. Mr. Ziomek reported that UMass has committed to contributing to the cost of educating university-associated children in the Amherst School system. He also reported that UMass is planning to rebuild the Lincoln Apartments and the North Village Apartments (for families).

Mr. Lee asked if there were property taxes associated with North Village since it will be a public/private partnership. Mr. Ziomek promised to send information on the Lincoln Avenue and Mass Avenue housing projects. He will also send information on whether they were designated for undergraduates or graduate students.

Ms. Brestrup reported that UMass plans to demolish one of the double lanes on Massachusetts Avenue (the southern double lane) so that the new housing can be “pushed” to the north and away from the neighborhoods to the south.

Mr. Ziomek reported that UTAC had “hit the pause button” meaning that they were no longer meeting. However progress had been made, including the “Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods” project and the Rental Registration Bylaw.

Ms. Wilder commented that UTAC gave the public a voice in the discussion and she felt that UMass was listening during UTAC meetings.

Mr. Ziomek offered his opinion that the concept of UTAC was good, but the structure was a problem. He noted that Nancy Buffone and Tony Maroulis had presented the UMass proposed housing projects to Town Council. He felt that UMass' response to the issue of relocation of tenants had been better after the meeting with Town Council.

Mr. Ziomek reported that the town will reach out to UMass regarding the relationship of the new housing with the neighborhood south of campus. He predicted that there may be an update for Town Council about this proposed housing in the spring.

Ms. Wilder stated that the ARA has been coming up with creative ideas on food security, housing security and other issues. She suggested that the ARA have input on all major developments proposed for the town. The ARA is a valuable resource to other boards and committees, she said.

Mr. Lee noted that the ARA had expressed support for the new 132 Northampton Road project.

ARA members discussed the types of projects that the ARA was created to work on – projects that include substandard, decadent or blighted areas. They discussed the role of the Amherst Municipal Affordable Housing Trust (AMAHT).

Ms. Wilder brought up the idea of cooperative development projects, taking advantage of the ARA's statutory role in helping developers who aren't willing or able to do certain things.

Ms. Wilder asked about the vacancy rate in Amherst and what is happening with dead space in town.

Mr. Ziomek reported on what he has heard anecdotally – that not as many houses are changing from ownership to rental as had been in the past. We are awaiting word about plans for the area around the PUB. We expect density there, he said.

Mr. Ziomek reported on sustainability goals. ECAC is working hard on its goals of 50% reduction in carbon emission by 2030 and 100% reduction by 2050. The four capital projects are being examined for meeting the net zero energy goals.

Ms. Wilder stated that she is interested in looking at zoning: homelessness, tiny homes, living off the grid and composting toilets.

Mr. Ziomek reported that the town is putting an emphasis on low income housing and is developing an Affordable Housing Policy. The Housing Production Plan establishes a goal of providing up to 50 affordable housing units per year. The town is working on developing East Street School for affordable housing and is supportive of the Valley CDC project at 132 Northampton Road.

Mr. Turner asked about the North Amherst Library, the gas station that was purchased by the town and the land owned by Potters along the river. He asked about the plans for rerouting the road and cleaning up this area. He asked how the town acquires property.

Mr. Ziomek described what he characterized as a “straightforward process” for acquiring property. First there is a conversation with the owner. The Town Manager would ask Mr. Ziomek to approach the owner. The town isn’t in the practice of “taking” land. The town pays for an appraisal of the property. We can’t pay more than the appraised price. The Town Manager makes a decision, with recommendations from boards and committees about whether the property is worth acquiring. In the end Town Council must vote on the acquisition of land.

Ms. Rooney stated that the ARA has had conversations about these properties in North Amherst. She asked if there were other amenities that the ARA could help to provide for. She mentioned the brook and its link to Mill River and the Schwarz Farm.

Ms. Wilder asked if there would be a different solution to the North Amherst intersection if the town owned all of the property.

Mr. Ziomek stated that it would be important to get the ARA’s feedback on the intersection design.

Mr. Turner asked how the town sells land.

Mr. Ziomek stated that the Town Manager was asked to pull together a process for disposal of surplus property – a Surplus Real Property Policy. The project would look at all of the properties owned by the town and put together an inventory. Some properties could be categorized as properties that the town no longer has a use for. The town is currently working on such an inventory. Properties identified as surplus would go through a process with Accounting where the town would seek bids from those who would like to acquire properties.

Mr. Ziomek stated that he would speak with Ms. Brestrup and the Town Manager about work that the ARA might become involved with. He would like to come back to meet with the ARA at a future date.

5. Matrix of potential redevelopment sites – updates

No discussion

6. Topics not anticipated 48 hours prior to the meeting

List of Redevelopment Authorities

Mr. Lee reported that he had created a list of all of the redevelopment authorities in Massachusetts. Some are active and some are not. He will send the list to Ms. Brestrup for distribution. He also has an updated matrix, which he will send as well.

Chapter 40R

Mr. Turner asked about the boundaries of the proposed Chapter 40R district. Ms. Rooney noted that the town cannot have a 40R district without having all of the details in place, including the transition from downtown to the edges of the surrounding residential areas. Strict guidelines would need to be created, including the maximum number of floors.

7. Next meeting

The next meeting was scheduled for Thursday, February 20, 2020.

8. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 6:05 p.m.