

AMHERST PLANNING BOARD
Wednesday, September 17, 2008 – 7:00 PM
Town Room, Town Hall
MINUTES

PRESENT: Susan Pynchon, Acting Chair; Richard Howland, Denise Barberet, Jonathan O’Keeffe, Bruce Carson, Ludmilla Pavlova-Gillham, Eduardo Suarez (7:15 PM)

ABSENT: Jonathan Shefftz, Kathleen Anderson

STAFF: Jonathan Tucker, Planning Director; Christine Brestrup, Senior Planner; Sue Krzanowski, Administrative Assistant

Ms. Pynchon opened the meeting at 7:07 PM.

I. MINUTES – Meeting of August 6, 2008 – postponed until later.

II. PUBLIC HEARING – SITE PLAN REVIEW APPLICATION

SPR2008-00004, Amherst Enterprise Park – Andrews & LaVerdiere

Request to construct a 12,800 sf, two-story wood frame construction office building with access drive and parking on 5.6 acres, Meadow Street. (Map 4D/Parcel 8, LI and FPC zoning districts) [continued from 04/02, 05/20, 06/04, 06/18, 07/16, 2008]

Mr. Howland recused himself and did not participate in this hearing.

The Board received a request to withdraw this application without prejudice. Mr. Ron LaVerdiere told the Board that they were requesting withdrawal without prejudice because there was still a lot of engineering work that needed to be done. Mr. LaVerdiere also told the Board that they are considering offering the land for conservation. They would like the Planning Board’s help in bringing this before Town Meeting, he said. If it doesn’t pass Town Meeting, they will be back with a development proposal, he said.

Mr. O’Keeffe MOVED: to allow the applicant’s request to withdraw the application without prejudice. Ms. Pavlova-Gillham seconded.

Ms. Barberet said she wanted to commend Mr. LaVerdiere for moving toward an acceptable solution.

The Motion passed 5-0 (Howland recused).

VII. OLD BUSINESS

A. Signing of Decision – SPR2009-00001, New England Environmental

The Board postponed action on this item so that Mr. Suarez would be available to participate in the discussion about the conditions.

B. Amherst College Lord Jeffrey Inn Renovation Project

The Board received correspondence from Amherst College with a progress report on issues raised by DPW and the Fire Department.

Ms. Brestrup noted that Amherst College will be coming back before the Board with revised plans.

C. Other – None

VI. NEW BUSINESS

A. Heritage Landscape Inventory Program – Letter of Support

Mr. Tucker said that Planning staff is working on an application for this program and would like a letter of support from the Planning Board. The grant is funded by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation and would provide communities with a planning tool for landscape preservation.

After several questions from the Board, Ms. Brestrup noted that there will be an initial public meeting to solicit input on what are the priority landscapes.

After further discussion, Mr. O’Keeffe MOVED: to authorize the Chair to write a letter of support for this effort. Ms. Suarez seconded, and the Motion passed 6-0-1 (Howland abstained).

Ms. Barberet asked who would choose the project coordinator. Mr. Tucker said that the recently hired Associate Planner, Nathaniel Malloy, is working on the application and will probably serve as the project coordinator.

III. PUBLIC HEARING – ZONING AMENDMENT

A-1-09 Duplexes in R-G & R-VC

Ms. Pynchon read the preamble and opened the public hearing for this request to alter the permit requirement for two family detached dwellings (duplexes) in the R-G and R-VC District from Special Permit to Site Plan Review approval, and to add a requirement for evaluation of the design of such duplexes.

Mr. O’Keeffe summarized the proposal for the Board which, he said, is the simplest of the proposed amendments. The Zoning Subcommittee has discussed it many times and although it has not made a recommendation (due to quorum and meeting issues), both he and Mr. Suarez support it. Design conditions have been added, he noted.

Mr. Tucker said that the proposal is in keeping with the recommendations of the master plan about increased density. This only addresses duplexes, he said, and while there may not be a flood of new units, it represents a piece of a larger pattern.

Mr. Howland spoke in support of the amendment and said that increased density is part of the draft comprehensive plan. The Board may want to consider adding mother-in-law apartments in the future, he suggested.

Ms. Barberet noted some hyphenation omissions in the text. Ms. Barberet asked if the design guidelines would be enforceable. Mr. Tucker said that the amendment would explicitly apply design standards where they do not apply now.

Ms. Barberet said that this has not passed Town Meeting before and said that the Board should anticipate what Town Meeting's objections might be beforehand.

Mr. Tucker said that the objections in the past have been over increasing density at all.

Mr. O'Keeffe said that past Town Meeting concerns were also about by-right versus discretionary uses. A ZBA representative attended the Subcommittee meeting, he said, and supports the amendment and recommends expanding it.

Ms. Pavlova-Gillham asked when the Master Plan will be finished. It's difficult to proceed without it, she said, and would be nice for the Board to have a finished product to stand by.

Mr. Tucker said that the Comprehensive Planning Committee has finished their job and is ready to submit the draft master plan to the Planning Board. There was brief discussion about the next steps.

Mr. Vladimir Morales, Town Meeting member, asked how many people answered the master plan survey. Ms. Pynchon noted that the Board was in the middle of a public hearing about a zoning amendment. Mr. Tucker told Mr. Morales that staff would get him the information.

There was no additional public comment.

Mr. Howland MOVED: to close the public hearing. Mr. Suarez seconded, and the Motion passed 7-0.

The Board discussed the village centers that would be affected by the amendment. Ms. Brestrup distributed maps showing the three village centers. Mr. Tucker described the difference between single-family residences with supplemental apartments and duplexes.

Mr. Howland MOVED: to recommend that Town Meeting adopt the proposed zoning amendment (A-1-09, Duplexes in R-G and R-VC), with the corrections noted by Ms. Barberet. Ms. Pavlova-Gillham seconded.

Ms. Pynchon asked about ZBA support for the amendment. Ms. Brestrup noted that although a ZBA member spoke in support of the amendment at the Subcommittee meeting, it was her personal opinion. The ZBA as a body has not discussed the proposal yet, she told the Board. Mr. O'Keeffe noted that the ZBA has been more engaged in the process than they previously were. Mr. Tucker said that the Board could reconsider the amendment if necessary. He suggested that staff ask the ZBA if they want to comment and/or attend the next Planning Board meeting to discuss it.

The Motion passed 7-0.

VII. OLD BUSINESS (continued)

A. Signing of Decision – SPR2009-00001, New England Environmental

Mr. Tucker said that further review of the draft decision for New England Environmental has raised an issue about the screening. There is a residential area

located to the east and well above the site. Condition #3 calls for a low evergreen hedge to be installed on the east side of Research Drive but this will not provide adequate screening because of the elevation differences, Mr. Tucker said. Staff recommend that the conditions be modified to have the applicant submit a revised landscape plan for the Board's review and approval, to allow for review of the proposed screening.

Mr. Howland expressed concern about changing the conditions without the applicant being present, and said the Board should have the consent of the applicant and allow them to make other changes as well.

After discussion, Mr. Howland MOVED: to amend Condition #5 to add "a revised landscape plan shall be submitted to the Board and reviewed and approved at a public meeting. Mr. Suarez seconded.

Mr. O'Keeffe said that the applicant should be aware of the motivation for the change.

The Motion passed 5-0 (Pavlova-Gillham and Carson, not participating). The Board later signed the revised decision.

I. MINUTES – Meeting of August 6, 2008

Mr. Howland MOVED: to approve the Minutes of August 6, 2008 with the change in conditions as just discussed. Ms. Barberet seconded, and the Motion passed 6-0-1 (Pavlova-Gillham abstained).

IV. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

After discussion, the Board elected to postpone elections until October 1, 2008 in the hope that a full Board will be present.

V. SUBCOMMITTEE ORGANIZATION/REORGANIZATION

Mr. Tucker said that traditionally the Board has created subcommittees to distribute the workload evenly. The subcommittees generally hold regular meetings outside the Planning Board meetings and report back to the full Board at the regular Planning Board meetings. The subcommittees develop recommendations which the Board can choose to accept or not. Once the Board decides on which subcommittees it should have, members can volunteer based on their interest. Mr. Tucker suggested that the Board consider maintaining a Zoning Subcommittee and establishing a new Master Plan Committee to complete the plan and carry it through to adoption. The Zoning Subcommittee has a heavy workload but is pretty much down to two full-time members. Mr. Suarez said that he would like to continue on the Zoning Subcommittee but cannot make the regular meeting time just before the Planning Board meetings. He could continue if the time/day is changed, he said.

Mr. Howland said it would be inappropriate to have a smaller subcommittee for the comprehensive plan because it's too large and should come before the whole Board. Discussion centered around who should review the draft master plan with general consensus that everyone should read it before the next meeting so it can be discussed. They did not make a decision on whether or not to form a Master Plan Subcommittee. Mr. Tucker asked if

anyone was interested in joining the Zoning Subcommittee. Mr. Carson indicated his interest. It was decided to have the next meeting on Wednesday, September 24, 2008 at 5:00 PM.

Mr. Howland MOVED: that Mr. Suarez, Mr. O’Keeffe and Mr. Carson serve as the Zoning Subcommittee for a minimum of one year.

However, a question was raised about whether or not Ms. Anderson was still on the Subcommittee. No one really seemed to know the answer.

Ms. Barberet seconded the Motion.

Mr. O’Keeffe wanted to amend the motion to recommend that Mr. Carson be added to the Zoning Subcommittee. Mr. Howland declined to amend his motion.

Mr. Suarez asked if staff would contact Ms. Anderson to ask about her status on the Subcommittee.

Mr. Howland MOVED: to add Mr. Carson to the Zoning Subcommittee. Mr. O’Keeffe seconded, and the Motion passed 7-0.

VI. NEW BUSINESS (continued)

B. Citizen Planner Training Collaborative – Fall 2008 Course Schedule

Mr. Tucker encouraged Board members to attend as many training sessions as they could.

XI. PLANNING BOARD SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

A. Zoning – Mr. O’Keeffe asked everyone to review the zoning articles.

XV. ADJOURNMENT

The Board adjourned this meeting at 9:11 PM.

Respectfully submitted:

Sue Krzanowski, Administrative Assistant

Approved:

Susan Pynchon, Acting Chair

DATE: _____