

AMHERST PLANNING BOARD
Wednesday, January 7, 2009 – 7:00 PM
Town Room, Town Hall
MINUTES

PRESENT: Susan Pynchon, Chair; Jonathan O’Keeffe, Denise Barberet, Bruce Carson, Richard Howland, Jonathan Shefftz (7:09 PM)

ABSENT: Eduardo Suarez, Ludmilla Pavlova-Gillham

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

Ms. Pynchon opened the meeting at 7:05 PM.

I. PUBLIC HEARING – SITE PLAN REVIEW

SPR2009-00003, Emily Dickinson Museum, 280 Main St., Trustees of Amherst College

Ms. Pynchon read the preamble and opened the hearing for this request for approval for reconstruction of a fence and several gate posts to restore the property edge as it appeared during Emily Dickinson’s lifetime. (Map 14B/Parcels 26 & 27; R-G district)

Jane Wald, Executive Director of the Emily Dickinson Museum, told the Board that the historic Dickinson Homestead and Evergreens properties were joined two years ago. A Master Plan was completed three years ago and several restoration projects are planned for the properties. The reconstruction of a fence and gate posts and removal of an overgrown hemlock hedge are among the first of these. This project will restore the property as it appeared during Emily Dickinson’s time and make it visible to the public.

Martha Lyon, landscape architect, described the proposed changes. Ms. Lyon said that the homes are enshrouded by the overgrown hemlock hedge. Some parts of the proposed fence and gate posts exceed the dimensional regulations; therefore, the applicant has applied for modification of those requirements under Site Plan Review approval.

Mr. Tucker noted that the Tree Warden has determined that the trees are not in the public way and are not part of the Board’s jurisdiction under this application.

Mr. O’Keeffe, the lone Board member to attend the site visit, said that he observed the proposed location of the hemlock trees, fence, gates and gate posts. He noted that the Site Visit Report was put on the table prior to tonight’s meeting.

Mr. Howland, referring to review comments by William Klaus of the Fire Department, said that the driveway needs to be adjusted so it can accommodate the pumper truck.

Ms. Wald said that they are willing to work with the Fire Department to meet their needs.

Mr. Howland said that the final plans should be reviewed by the Board.

Catherine Madsen, Shumway Street, expressed concern about losing the mature shade trees and said the Town should be compensated for the loss of the trees' shade and carbon impact.

Jerry Guidera, 446 Main Street, said that he applauds Amherst College for cutting down the trees which, he said, are an eyesore and obstruct the historic homes from public view. He asked the museum to reconsider restoring the hemlock hedge, commenting that he gets requests for directions to the Emily Dickinson Homestead at least once a month.

Carlton Brose, 36 Triangle Street, agreed that the trees should come down and not be replaced so that the beautiful historic homes are visible. He said this action had been a long time coming.

Ms. Lyon showed images of how the site had looked during Emily Dickinson's lifetime.

Ms. Wald said that even with the new hedge the houses will be elevated and will still be very prominent and quite visible from the street.

Mr. Howland noted that the hedge can be trimmed to maintain visibility.

Ms. Barberet asked about any woolly adelgid infestation. Ms. Lyon said that the existing hemlock trees are infected, but that any infection in the new hedge plantings can be managed in what will be a much more controlled environment.

Mr. Tucker noted that the purpose of the application was to allow the fence and gate posts to exceed the dimensional regulations and said that the trees were really not part of the application. He noted that the Town had allocated \$15,000 in CPAC funds to study the historic landscape and enable its restoration on the site.

Mr. Guidera recommended that the fence be installed first and after waiting for a year or so, the hedge could be installed to see if visibility is maintained.

Ms. Nancy Brose, 36 Triangle Street, expressed concern that the hedge be kept trimmed to maintain visibility.

Mr. O'Keeffe MOVED: to close the public hearing. Mr. Carson seconded, and the Motion passed 6-0.

Mr. Howland attempted a Motion: to approve SPR2009-00003, Emily Dickinson Museum, 280 Main Street, subject to resolution of concerns raised by the Fire Department, and with the condition that the hedge is maintained to ensure visibility. The plans should be resubmitted back to the Planning Board for approval of changes needed to meet the Fire Department's issues.
Mr. Carson seconded.

Mr. O'Keeffe noted that the applicant had requested waivers for the lighting plan, sign plan, and traffic impact statement.

Mr. Howland revised his Motion: to approve SPR2009-00003, Emily Dickinson Museum, 280 Main Street, as submitted, subject to the following waivers and conditions:

Waivers

- 1) Lighting Plan
- 2) Sign Plan
- 3) Traffic Impact Statement

Conditions

- 1) The hedge shall be maintained so that the structures remain clearly visible from the street.
- 2) The plans shall be subject to Fire Department and Town Engineer review and revised plans brought back to the Planning Board if modification is necessary.
- 3) The landscaping shall be installed and continuously maintained.
- 4) Three (3) copies of the final plans shall be submitted to the Planning Department.
- 5) This approval will expire in two (2) years if substantial construction has not begun.

Mr. O’Keeffe asked if it was within the Board’s purview to control the hedge. Ms. Barberet noted that the hedge is part of the landscaping plan. Mr. O’Keeffe agreed and withdrew his objection.

Ms. Barberet seconded the Motion, and it passed 6-0.

II. DRAFT MASTER PLAN – Next Steps

A. Correspondence – Amherst Area Chamber of Commerce

The Board received a letter from the Chamber of Commerce with respect to the draft Master Plan urging expedient adoption of the Master Plan, putting zoning changes in place as quickly as possible, and favorable permit reviews for applications for desirable uses in the meantime.

Mr. Howland commented that the Board has little control over timelines. Revising the Zoning Bylaw will not be fast, he said, and is going to be a lot of work.

Ms. Barberet said that she would like to hear more from the Chamber about statements in the letter. Which areas of improvement should the Town focus on to maximize the community’s economic strength, and what are the conflicting preservation, land use and development goals?

Mr. Howland said that the best thing the Board could do at this point is to move to get the Master Plan adopted.

Mr. Tucker said that staff recommends formation of a subcommittee, which would meet on a regular basis to complete the editing of the document and report back to the full Board.

Ms. Pynchon asked if the Board wanted to take any action with respect to the letter. Mr. O’Keeffe said that the Board should thank the Chamber for their interest.

Ms. Pynchon asked staff to draft a response for her review. It should note that the Board will move with appropriate urgency and looks forward to working with the Chamber in implementing the plan. Mr. Tucker agreed to draft a letter for Ms. Pynchon’s signature.

B. Other

The Board discussed the next steps and if there has been enough public comment, whether or not there should be a presentation to the Select Board before adopting the plan, changes to the final draft, completion of the plan, and finally, adoption.

Staff noted that there hasn’t been any further public comment received since the notice was posted in November. Mr. O’Keeffe suggested that the Board ask the Select Board if they would like a final presentation. Ms. Pynchon asked staff to draft a memo to the Select Board. Mr. Tucker said he would do so.

Ms. Barberet suggested that a notice be sent to Town Meeting members, offering an opportunity for comment on the final draft. It was agreed that staff would draft a notice to Town Meeting members to go on the Town Meeting website.

Mr. Tucker again urged the Board to establish a subcommittee to work on final revisions and completion of the plan, selection of graphics and how to proceed.

Mr. Howland said that each member of the Planning Board should read the entire draft.

The Board continued to discuss whether or not to form a subcommittee or send comments to staff or both. At the end of the discussion, there was agreement that each member would read the entire draft and submit comments to the Planning Director. A Master Plan subcommittee was established with members Denise Barberet and Bruce Carson. Absent members Ludmilla Pavlova-Gillham and Eduardo Suarez will be contacted to see if they are interested in serving on the Subcommittee. Mr. O’Keeffe volunteered to fill the third spot if they are not able to serve. The Subcommittee might meet on alternate Wednesdays, around 5:00 PM.

Ms. Pynchon asked staff to write up the process in a document separate from the minutes. Mr. Tucker agreed to do so.

III. OLD BUSINESS

Ms. Pynchon asked whether the concern over signing the Attorney General's form for Article 8 had been resolved. Ms. Barberet described the technical issue that had been brought to her by a Town Meeting member. Mr. Tucker said that enough Planning Board member signatures had been acquired to send the form on.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

A. Design Review Board Handbook – Mr. Tucker briefly summarized the history and origins of design review in Amherst and noted that the Board should read through the handbook to familiarize themselves with the regulations since they will be applied to future development proposals.

Ms. Barberet suggested that a paragraph on page 6 should be moved to page 11.

B. Correspondence – Pioneer Valley Planning Commission – in packet

C. Planning Briefs – in packet

D. Planning Board Meeting Schedule – Mr. Tucker recommended that the Board continue meeting on the first and third Wednesdays of the month until they hear from Ms. Pavlova-Gillham.

E. Other – Ms. Brestrup asked if the Board wanted to discuss setting a standard day/time for site visits. After discussion it was decided to continue to schedule site visits on an as-needed basis.

V. FORM A (ANR) SUBDIVISION APPLICATIONS – No Applications

VI. UPCOMING ZBA APPLICATIONS

The Board decided not to review the following:

ZBA2009-00019 - Jewish Community of Amherst, 742 Main Street
ZBA2009-00020 - Chabad House of Amherst, 30 North Hadley Road
ZBA2009-00021 - Burt Ewart & Linda Muerle, 327 Shays Street
ZBA2009-00022 - Elephants of Mercy, 460 West Street

VII. UPCOMING SPP/SPR/SUB APPLICATIONS – No Applications

VIII. PLANNING BOARD SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

A. Zoning Subcommittee – Mr. O'Keeffe said that tonight's meeting was the first for the Subcommittee since the Zoning Forum in December. The Subcommittee will bring a prioritized list of tentative zoning articles to the next Planning Board meeting. Mr. O'Keeffe also told the Board that he will post abbreviated minutes of the Zoning Subcommittee meetings on the Town's website.

IX. PLANNING BOARD COMMITTEE REPORTS

- A. Pioneer Valley Planning Commission** – No Report
- B. Community Preservation Act Committee** – Ms. Barberet said that the Committee discussed Plum Brook with Town Counsel who said it was okay to continue to use CPAC money for the project. The Committee also discussed the eligibility of interpretive signs and a report on the Hills House lots purchase.
- C. Agricultural Commission** – No Report

X. REPORT OF THE CHAIR - No Report

VIII. PLANNING BOARD SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS (continued)

Mr. O’Keeffe added that the Zoning Subcommittee also discussed the Mullin Rule and would like the Planning Board to consider asking Town Meeting to adopt it. He suggested that this be put on the agenda for the Board’s consideration.

XI. REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR – Mr. Tucker said that traditionally Town Counsel provides a training session for the Planning and Zoning Boards around this time of the year. He will talk to the Board about tentative dates at the next meeting.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Howland MOVED: to adjourn this meeting at 9:16 PM. Mr. O’Keeffe seconded, and the Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted:

Sue Krzanowski, Administrative Assistant

Approved:

Susan Pynchon, Chair

DATE: _____