

**AMHERST PLANNING BOARD • ZONING SUBCOMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES**

Town Room, Town Hall, Amherst, Massachusetts • Wednesday, July 6, 2011

Members present: Bruce Carson, Rob Crowner, Jonathan O’Keeffe, Richard Roznoy
Others present: Diana Stein (leave 6:30), Sara LaCoeur (leave 6:40), Laura Fitch
Staff: Jonathan Tucker, Christine Brestrup

J. O’Keeffe called the meeting to order at 5:04 pm w/ standard introductions: recorded by Amherst Media, public meeting, etc.

Minutes – of the June 29 meeting reviewed. Crowner comment: simplify method of presenting digital map information. MOVED by Crowner to approve as modified, Carson seconded, approved, 3-0-1 (Roznoy abstaining).

Presentation by Cecil Group: Steve Cecil; Ted Brovitz. Presentation by means of PowerPoint, maps, graphics identifying North Amherst and South Amherst/Atkins Corners areas of town.

- Overview of both projects, efforts focused on developing form based code zoning. Review of planning resources used: zoning bylaws, 2002 workbook for ideas for Atkins Corners, other work. Attempting to break down the areas into “transects,” where there are common uses, common features:
 - Atkins Corner: 1) Natural features; 2) Institutional - Hamp. College, etc.; 3) other major features; 4) beyond that, residential, rural-residential, then further beyond, more rural.
 - North Amherst: 1) center core of the village; 2) commercial, hugging Sunderland Rd, more highway oriented than traditional commercial; 3) traditional village residential component, Montague Rd.; 4) student housing, co-housing, apartment complexes; 5) residential-rural housing, long-term established.
- North Amherst, info emanating from village charettes: need to accommodate old traditional farm houses with other sectors of the neighborhood, as developed over decades. Prospects for the commercial/industrial sectors, possible use of a farmer’s market, issues of properties with setbacks, how private roads may interact with public.

Issues of traffic flow at the triangle corner, seen as dangerous; possibility of Montague Rd. coming into the area north of the intersection, creates a green, new frontage, more pedestrian friendly. More of an infrastructure issue, not zoning. Possible one-side of street parking. Mention of pedestrian, bicycle paths, traffic flow south of the intersection.

Zoning, North Amherst: Possibility of creating a high density core area of mixed uses (see map, “Zoning Recommendations – colors on map are existing zoning). They would encourage a mix of uses in the core area; stakeholders have strongly expressed maintaining the residential zone on Montague Rd. Possibly keep a 40’ frontage district, residential or commercial for the front 40’ then it could open up to other uses above and beyond. As oriented toward the street, commercial area to remain commercial. Exact boundaries not yet identified.

Question from B. Carson re potential new building, e.g., on Sunderland Rd: would it need to have commercial component? Response: after the setback, could become other than the streetside use. Question, R. Crowner: 40-50 feet not much? A: yes, idea is to bring the buildings closer to the street. Maximum setback is missing in current zoning bylaw; idea is to draw people into the property.

Residential elements on Montague Rd. discussed, how form based zoning would preserve residential character yet give variety; using properties to make efficient use of the space.

- **Atkins Corners.** Identified land uses, interests of stakeholders via charette. Edge to be defined by new public street, south of current Atkins market. Parcels identified for potential commercial development. Connections into campus, between and among various residential complexes, via auto or as pedestrian, identified as a need. (See Atkins Corner Concept Plan).

Zoning: focused around the new double roundabout; some mixed use, some commercial, some residential. (See Zoning Recommendations map.) Also have considered a transfer of density with other areas. Opportunity for infill development.

Discuss pedestrian, bicycle pathways around the roundabouts, best means to accommodate them – move them off the roadway/roundabouts. Idea of having an open corner, allowing pedestrians to move around the areas; or setting up an auxiliary commercial enterprise on the corner, to draw people in.

Additional meetings July 25, 26 (one for each area, North/South) will develop more specific plans following. May add form based standards to Article 4, changes elsewhere in bylaw to make it compatible throughout.

Questions/discussion:

O’Keefe: 2 new zoning districts that do not exist now? A: Yes; will need to be defined, developed.

Brestrup: How do uses now in North Amherst, non-conforming or inconsistent with proposed zones, fit in with proposed new form based zoning? A: May want to have a development bonus, to combine properties, to create a new property that can be used for new purposes. Incentives may be, change uses if there’s larger parcel.

Roznoy: What about transportation between these areas and the remainder of town? interplay of infrastructure and zoning? A (Tucker): Current use of buses, vehicles that we currently have, for foreseeable future.

Carson: How does the setback distance work? A: within a range of reasonable possibilities, should be comparable to a neighbor’s setback.

Crowner: Does form based code fit within site plan review, special permit applications? A: SPR & SP will still be needed, but generally speaking, more things will be allowed by right;

zoning bylaw will need to be made compatible; uses, per se, will not be as paramount.

O’Keefe: Some new “monolithic” district in each area? How do you determine what uses are appropriate for each? A: Somewhat of an exaggeration that it doesn’t matter what use so long as it fits the form. Here, the uses will be largely tied to the roads: particular roads/streets will have a predilection toward certain types of uses, although certain uses would fit a variety of locations. The character of the use (placement of parking, buildings) much more important.

Tucker: Are there ways via zoning to selectively encourage residential uses other than student housing? A: Best to enter into development agreements, using Contract Zoning: Create custom zoning by agreement, with the developer and town entering into agreement, say, for town & developer to exchange benefits; needs simultaneous TM approval.

Tucker: How do you assure, via zoning, that there’s a bulwark against student housing? A: Can establish for the district maximum proportions of any particular use (retail / housing; commercial / retail; commercial / residential; residential / mixed; etc.)

Carson: What about the river in North Amherst? A: Interested in providing space for walkways, use of the greenway, expanding access to the river may be appropriate. Possibility of TDRs raised, considered.

L. Fitch: Parking underneath buildings? A: Certainly preferable; is primarily a cost issue. What of at ground level, with parking below? A: diminishes positive effects of form based zoning; detrimental to pedestrian and sidewalk grade. A portion on a grade would work well, with some below visibility to street.

Conclusion, O’Keefe, Cecil, Brovitz: Upcoming meetings of consultants with stakeholders (July 25-26); materials will be available for ZSC and others for distribution and electronically, to be put on town website.

Other: Next ZSC meeting, July 20.

Meeting adjourned, 6:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Richard T. Roznoy