

AMHERST PLANNING BOARD
Wednesday, February 15, 2012 – 7:00 PM
Town Room, Town Hall
MINUTES

PRESENT: David Webber, Chair; Rob Crowner, Bruce Carson, Richard Roznoy, Connie Kruger, Stephen Schreiber, Sandra Anderson and Kathleen Ford

ABSENT: Jonathan O’Keeffe

STAFF: Jonathan Tucker, Planning Director
Christine Brestrup, Senior Planner

Mr. Webber opened the meeting at 7:03 PM. He announced that the meeting was being recorded by town staff and recorded and broadcast live by Amherst Media.

I. MINUTES February 1, 2012

Mr. Schreiber MOVED to approve the Minutes of February 1, 2012. Mr. Crowner seconded and the vote was 7-0-1 (Anderson abstained).

II. DISCUSSION

UMass Draft Master Plan – Discussion about the UMass Draft Master Plan (which was presented to the Board on February 1, 2012)

Niels la Cour, Senior Planner at UMass Campus Planning, attended the meeting and participated in the discussion.

Mr. Webber commented that the presentation on February 1st had been a good one and had provided the Planning Board with a better understanding of what UMass is thinking and planning to do.

Mr. Crowner noted that there would be a big impact on the town if the street grid pattern south of campus were completed as recommended by the Gateway Corridor consultant. He hopes that UMass pursues this vision and provides a lot of opportunity for community review.

Mr. la Cour reported that he had attended a recent meeting between UMass and the town on the Gateway Traffic Study, encompassing the area around Fearing Street, Lincoln Avenue and North Pleasant Street. The issue of completing the grid had been discussed.

Ms. Ford asked about the area between UMass and the downtown and what the potential was for a continuity of streetscapes.

Mr. la Cour reported that in the last five years, UMass has been more engaged with the town. Communication is the key, he said.

Ms. Anderson noted that she had worked for the university before she retired and Mr. la Cour works for the university now but used to work for the town, factors which will aid communication and understanding between the town and the university.

Mr. Webber stated that he would like to see how the town and the university can become better integrated. The Gateway Corridor concept will help with this effort, promoting improved access between the downtown and UMass.

Mr. Tucker noted that the traffic study that is currently underway is a good example of the town and the university working together. The result will be a traffic study for the Gateway Corridor that is coordinated with the traffic study that is already underway at the university. At the charettes last spring there was discussion about the Gateway Corridor acting as a bridge between the university and the town. Mr. Tucker that noted another example of cooperation has been the work with Amherst College on crosswalks.

Ms. Kruger stated that she was impressed with the presentation about the UMass Master Plan. However she expressed concern about the idea of discouraging cars in the center of campus. There needs to be a balance in meeting the needs of pedestrians, bicycle riders and vehicles, to allow people to access the center of campus. She also noted that care needs to be taken to integrate housing into the campus community. Ms. Kruger would like to see the town and the university work together on the issue of housing.

Mr. Carson asked about the issue of the university not being able to allow private developers to build housing on campus. Can this law be changed? Mr. la Cour offered to look into this issue.

Mr. Tucker explained that state law is intended to protect workers on public projects. Where there are no rules, workers can be paid less, he said. [This is one reason for the fact that private developers are not currently allowed to build private housing on a public campus in Massachusetts.]

Ms. Anderson asked about the scope of the Master Plan and where its northern boundary is located. There was discussion about the location of the northern boundary. Mr. la Cour explained that the university has active farmland to the north of the campus.

Ms. Anderson asked about the bike path heading north out of the university land towards North Amherst Center and whether the bike path could reach the Wsocki House and the roundabout area. Mr. la Cour reported that there may be an opportunity to get CPAC funding for a feasibility study for the bike path.

Mr. Roznoy asked how far into the future the UMass Master Plan extends. Mr. la Cour noted that it is a 50 year plan, however the next 10 years are the most notable, since projects have already been identified. The picture becomes "more fuzzy" the farther into the future it goes.

Mr. Roznoy expressed surprise that UMass is still looking at parking and getting cars into the campus in the future. He recommended that the university create satellite areas for vehicles to park and identify a few major places on campus where vehicles would be allowed to go.

Mr. la Cour noted that the university is in the process of figuring out where cars need to be and where they should not be on campus. There is a plan for a new building containing a parking garage and student services where the old power plant is currently located. This is a central location on campus. The Fine Arts Center provides a challenge for access since some people need to be dropped off at the front door.

Mr. Webber noted that he had a recent meeting on campus and he used the Campus Center garage, since he needed to park close to the meeting location. He suggested installing an underground tram from the Campus Center Garage to the Fine Arts Center. He asked about the level of undergraduate enrollment through 2020. He noted that there are no plans for increasing residential space on campus and therefore the plan, beyond 2020, is incomplete.

Mr. Tucker observed that it is hard to project student numbers beyond 5, 10 or 20 years with any sense of reality. The Master Plan contemplates a "potential", in other words, a sense of what "might be possible".

Mr. la Cour stated that the university has run some numbers with regard to student enrollment. There is capacity on campus to house students and to provide academic and support space.

Mr. Webber asked if there were any plans for residences within the campus, aside from Commonwealth College. Mr. la Cour noted that the university is planning for a "24/7" campus. Housing is now primarily located on the east and north sides of campus. In the future housing will be located closer to the "core".

Mr. Webber thanked Mr. la Cour and stated that he and the Planning Board look forward to

working with UMass over the next decade.

III. OLD BUSINESS

- A.** Ginger Garden – SPR2011-00008 – 351 Northampton Road
Report on status of landscape screening

Ms. Brestrup reported that the plants that were approved as part of the Site Plan Review for this project had been installed, although the sizes of the plants were very small. Unfortunately there had been no discussion of size during the approval process. Ms. Kruger noted that this can be a learning experience. In the future, in addition to giving the species and location of plants, the size should also be given on the plans and as part of the conditions of approval. Mr. Tucker noted that the Planning Board can refer to the Amherst Landscaping Guidelines and to Section 11.31 of the Zoning Bylaw when discussing sizes of plant materials.

There was further discussion of the planting at Ginger Garden.

Ms. Brestrup noted that the whole application process for this project had been fairly difficult. The applicants had seemed fairly resistant to submitting any site plan information. They had been asked by the Building Commissioner to apply for Site Plan Review approval because of a Building Code requirement for emergency egress ramps at the rear of the building. The applicants had been advised by their consultants that the ramps were not necessary. It had been difficult to get even the minimum amount of information from the applicants. They had argued that the site was already well-landscaped and that it had no need of additional plantings. The applicants also argued that they were reopening a restaurant that had operating on the same site for many years. They believed that site improvements should not be required. Altogether, it was a difficult process.

- B.** Topics not reasonably anticipated 48 hours prior to the meeting – none

IV. NEW BUSINESS

- A.** Village Center Rezoning – Discussion about the status of Village Center Rezoning and Form-Based Code

Mr. Webber introduced the topic, noting that the whole Planning Board had asked to be kept informed and to participate in discussions on the topic of Village Center Rezoning and Form-Based Code. He invited members of the Zoning Subcommittee (ZSC) to give an update.

Mr. Crowner reported that the ZSC had held its semi-annual Zoning Forum in early January. It had evolved into an open forum on Village Center rezoning. As a result of what had been said at the Zoning Forum as well as earlier discussions, the ZSC had decided to split the rezoning of the two Village Centers apart. There were some changes proposed for the map. In the fall there had been larger areas that were proposed for rezoning, but these areas had gotten smaller. To date, only the maps have changed. No differences in dimensional standards, use or form standards have been proposed yet. Mr. Carson noted that the ZSC had not yet gotten into the Form-Based Code and hadn't decided yet where the Village Center Overlay would be. Mr. Crowner noted that the ZSC had not yet decided which Village Center to pursue first, or whether the two Village Centers would be presented to Town Meeting at the same time.

There was discussion about which Village Center should be rezoned first, with some Board members stressing that Atkins Corners should be rezoned first because the roadways were already being altered and things are happening there. In North

Amherst, nothing is happening yet. Others believed that North Amherst should be rezoned first because it is already a “village center”. There was discussion about where the Village Center Form-Based Overlay should be located.

There was also discussion about the process going forward. Board members noted that the ZSC makes recommendations to the Planning Board and then the Planning Board decides what goes forward to Town Meeting and makes a recommendation to Town Meeting on whether the zoning amendment should be accepted or not.

Mr. Tucker observed that in the recent past the ZSC has brought a full package to the Planning Board.

Mr. Webber stated that the full Board only saw the Village Center rezoning article at the public hearing and there was no time to discuss the details. The Board would like to take a more “proactive” role this time.

Mr. Schreiber asked about the cost of implementing the Village Center rezoning. What will be the infrastructure costs? What would be the benefit to the town? Can we get an appraiser to evaluate the costs and benefits? Discussions with the Finance Committee might be useful.

Mr. Tucker stated that the Finance Committee was split on this issue. The members had been asked for information on how to go about a financial analysis. Mr. Tucker noted that a financial analysis is difficult since the changes will occur over decades and will not happen all at once. In addition, the town may get state grants and state highway funds to help to pay for some of the work.

Mr. Webber asked if the streetscape designs would be binding on the DPW. Mr. Tucker explained that the streetscape designs would not be binding on the DPW but would be an advisory statement of public intent for those with decision-making jurisdiction over the public way.

Mr. Roznoy noted that he had written a memo to the Zoning Subcommittee on street types in which he strongly encouraged that public transit components be included “for the current time”. The conceptual presentation of street types in last fall’s Article 17 left out the transit component. He discouraged the use of on-street parking and encouraged the use of a public transit lane in its place. He recommended a dividing island in the Village Center street type.

Mr. Roznoy asked for a discussion about the rezoning of Montague Road.

Mr. Carson stated that the ZSC is not ready for this discussion yet. The ZSC has heard from residents who fear the FBC Overlay zoning district. The residents would like to keep FBC in the core of the Village Center but not in the areas surrounding it.

Mr. Tucker noted that the residents also fear that historic resources will be lost over time.

Mr. Roznoy asked for feedback from other Planning Board members about the fact that transportation was not a major factor. Transportation can be a focus that creates a dynamic change, he said.

Mr. Schreiber stated that he sees things another way. He referred to “Complete Streets” and the fact that there will be multiple users of the streets. This is not a dense urban area. The addition of transit lanes would require widening of the street. There should be language about how the road can change over time. Mr. Schreiber referred to the fact that there had been streetcars that ran in the streets in the past. He noted that cars parked on both sides of the street provided safety and accessibility. There should be multiple uses allowed within the Right-of-Way.

Mr. Webber stated that in this geographical area and climate automobiles will always have a place in our transportation system.

Ms. Anderson agreed with the wording changes that had been suggested by Mr. Roznoy and she noted that the Transportation Task Force may have something to say about the design of the roadways.

Mr. Carson noted that zoning cannot dictate what the streets will be like.

Mr. Tucker observed that there needs to be language in the zoning amendment to clarify jurisdiction for public ways. He noted that there are several groups working on the issue of streets. The Transportation Plan Task Force is working on a Transportation Plan. Another group is working on "Complete Streets". The Select Board has jurisdiction over the public ways.

Ms. Kruger stated that she is not yet ready to have the parked cars disappear from the streetscape. There are other global issues, such as the price of gas that will determine people's choices for transportation.

Mr. Webber and Ms. Kruger noted that they would like to have Mr. Roznoy's support for the zoning amendment as the Board moves forward.

Mr. Tucker suggested that the street types could show all of the ways that the roads might be used.

Mr. Schreiber stated that we need to have sensibility to the roadway system as it is now. Roadways can change and we can't predict how they will change in the future.

Ms. Anderson noted use of electric vehicles and that there is a need for electric docking stations.

The Board discussed the various proposals for rezoning of Montague Road.

Mr. Tucker presented three scenarios for the rezoning of Montague Road currently under consideration by the Zoning Subcommittee.

Mr. Webber stated that he lives on Montague Road in a historic house at the corner of Ball Lane. He observed that the biggest issues among residents of that area are that the property owners on the east side of Montague Road do not want their properties to be rezoned and they do not want the west side to be developed for apartment buildings.

Mr. Tucker described the proposed rezoning of the area west of Sunderland Road. The NAVC zoning is proposed for upland, buildable areas only. Portions of the land west of Sunderland Road are within the 100 year flood zone, he said. In the current proposal, only areas that are unbuildable will be "down-zoned" to Residential from Commercial, he said.

Ms. Kruger asked about the "waiver issue" under proposed Section 16.91. She recommended that the zoning amendment include requirements for affordable housing [inclusionary zoning]. Mr. Tucker stated that Section 15 of the Zoning Bylaw, Inclusionary Zoning, applies to all developments over 9 units that require a Special Permit. He noted that Inclusionary Zoning requires that units be set aside for low and moderate income households.

Ms. Kruger would like to revisit the issue of income levels with regard to inclusionary zoning – 80% versus 120% of Area Median Income.

Mr. Tucker stated that Section 15 of the Bylaw does not apply to mixed uses, which would be permitted by right. In the past, the town has put an emphasis on the

development of “work-force” housing [120% or less of Area Median Income]. However, we are now in a different situation with regard to the Massachusetts SHI [Subsidized Housing Inventory – 80% or less of Area Median Income].

Mr. Tucker recommended that the issue of affordable housing be dealt with by amending Section 15 of the Zoning Bylaw in the future, rather than trying to include affordable housing in the zoning amendment that is currently being discussed.

Mr. Crouner noted that townhouses were originally proposed to be allowed in the Village Center by Site Plan Review. The current proposal would allow them by Special Permit. This change might encourage developers to propose mixed-use buildings which are allowed by Site Plan Review, especially if the town does not require affordable units in mixed-use buildings.

Mr. Tucker presented changes that are being proposed for the rezoning of the Atkins Corners area. Rather than proposing AC zoning on the east side of Route 116, the current proposal is for R-VC zoning on the east side, including portions of the Cole property. River resources affect the “buildability” of the Cole property, he said.

There was discussion about pedestrian access across Route 116.

Ms. Ford suggested putting the new roadway edges for the roundabouts on the rezoning plans to make the circulation pattern easier to understand.

Mr. Crouner asked if Planning Board members had any recommendations for the ZSC regarding the rezoning of Montague Road.

Mr. Webber noted that there were three competing factions in the rezoning effort:

- The single-family homeowner residents;
- The Jones family;
- The Puffer family.

Mr. Webber agreed with leaving both sides of Montague Road residential, rezoning the area south of the Mill River Recreation Area driveway as R-VC and leaving R-N on both sides of the road up to the Cowls property on the corner, the front of which could become R-VC.

Mr. Roznoy asked about existing rental properties and the competition that new rental units would bring. He noted that residents of the area would like to preserve single-family homes, but he observed that the majority of the houses are already rental housing.

Mr. Tucker noted that residents fear that any new housing will be occupied by students. However, Riverside Apartments is about half occupied by families.

Mr. Webber said that he views the changes to the South Amherst [Atkins Corners] zoning map favorably and has heard mostly positive reactions from Board members.

Mr. Tucker encouraged individual Planning Board members to choose particular topics relating to Village Center zoning and Form-base Code and to be prepared to respond to these topics at Town Meeting.

- B.** CPTC Brochure – Mr. Webber acknowledged receipt of the brochure and encouraged Board members to attend the conference.
 - C.** Topics not reasonably anticipated 48 hours prior to the meeting - none
- V. FORM A (ANR) SUBDIVISION APPLICATIONS**

The Planning Board endorsed the following plan:

ANR 2012-00007 – W.D. Cows, Inc. – West side of Flat Hills Road, north of #248 Flat Hills Road – Map 6A, Parcel 91

VI. UPCOMING ZBA APPLICATIONS – none

VII. UPCOMING SPP/SPR/SUB APPLICATIONS – Ms. Brestrup reported that there are two applications that are expected to be submitted by Amherst College, for Site Plan Review:

- 79 South Pleasant Street
- 67 Northampton Road.

VIII. PLANNING BOARD SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

Zoning – The report had been given earlier in the meeting by ZSC members, Mr. Carson and Mr. Crowner.

IX. PLANNING BOARD COMMITTEE & LIAISON REPORTS

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission – Mr. Schreiber reported that the PVPC met last Thursday [February 9th] and that the theme of the meeting had been transportation. Mr. Brennan had reported on local transportation projects. There was also discussion of the local option for a sales tax and an effort to enable the Pioneer Valley to keep the sales tax for transportation projects. Mr. Schreiber reported that there had been a discussion about the proposed modification to Resolve #7, which dealt with a feasibility study for the inland rail line. The PVPC had proposed that part of the modification be incorporated in Resolve #7, to seek funding to upgrade the tracks for freight. Representatives from Palmer had been present. The modified resolution passed unanimously. Blake La Mothe was one of the representatives from Palmer who is very interested in trains.

Community Preservation Act Committee – Ms. Anderson reported that she had missed the last CPAC meeting. CPAC will meet again on February 16th. Presentations from those requesting CPA funds have been underway and deliberations will begin soon.

Agricultural Commission – no report

Transportation Plan Task Force – Mr. Roznoy reported that the TPTF had its first meeting. The Task Force is developing goals and objectives and a vision statement and will be working on an RFP for a Transportation Plan. The TPTF is authorized for one year. The next meeting is at 8:30 a.m. on Thursday, February 16th.

Amherst Redevelopment Authority – Ms. Kruger reported that the ARA has not met recently and seems to be in a hiatus since the activity related to the Gateway Corridor project.

Design Review Board – no report

Other Boards and Committees – no report

X. REPORT OF THE CHAIR – Mr. Webber reported that he had attended a meeting of the UMass Student Legal Services Advisory Committee. At the meeting he had talked about the presentation on the UMass Draft Master Plan. Several people in attendance had submitted comments online regarding the Draft Master Plan.

XI. REPORT OF STAFF – none

XII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:17 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Approved:

DATE: _____

AMHERST PLANNING BOARD
February 15, 2012

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Christine M. Brestrup,
Senior Planner

David Webber, Chair