

AMHERST PLANNING BOARD
Wednesday, December 5, 2012 – 7:00 PM
Town Room, Town Hall
MINUTES

PRESENT: David Webber, Chair; Jonathan O’Keeffe, Bruce Carson, Rob Crowner, Sandra Anderson, Stephen Schreiber, Richard Roznoy, and Kathleen Ford

ABSENT: Connie Kruger

STAFF: Jonathan Tucker, Planning Director
Christine Brestrup, Senior Planner
Mr. Webber opened the meeting at 7:06 PM.

I. MINUTES

Reviewing the Minutes of November 7, 2012, Mr. Webber asked that a change be made to the top of page 9, to add the following sentence after a question asked by Mr. Webber with regard to information provided in the application:

“Attorney Reidy stated that the information in the application was true to the best of his knowledge.”

Mr. Schreiber MOVED to approve the Minutes of November 7, 2012, as amended. Mr. O’Keeffe seconded. The vote was 7-0-1 (Anderson abstained)

II. APPEARANCE

Amherst College Science Center, Tom Davies, Assistant Director of Facilities – presentation and review of Site Plan under Section 3.211 of the Zoning Bylaw

Tom Davies presented information about the proposed Science Center to be constructed on the Amherst College campus. Construction is expected to begin in June 2013. It will be phased and is expected to be completed by 2017. He presented a series of plans, elevations and perspectives showing the building nestled into the side of the hill with a view towards the athletic fields. It will occupy the same location as the existing science center, which was built in the 1960’s. The building will consist of a series of terraces that will step down the hillside to take advantage of the topography. Glass will wrap around the building and a large skylight will bring sunlight in. It will be an interdisciplinary building with no separate wings for the separate disciplines. Research labs will be built into the hillside. There will be a central atrium space from which other spaces will spin off. An exhaust vent will rise through the roof and will have a unique and graceful shape.

Behnisch Architekten of Stuttgart, Germany, is working with Payette of Boston to design this project. Payette has a lot of experience with academic buildings and science buildings. Behnisch is known for solving tricky problems such as the siting of this building and for its work on sustainability.

Board members complimented Mr. Davies on the design and asked questions about roadways, phasing, timing, and replacement of the existing science center. Mr. Davies stated that the roadway behind Mead Hall will be removed and the new building will be built in two phases, around the existing building. As pieces of the new building are completed, pieces of the old building will be demolished. A dormitory has been torn down to make a place for the new building. All of the East Campus dorms will eventually be replaced, he said.

This will be the largest academic building on campus, although it will not be much larger than the existing science complex.

Mr. Schreiber asked if there were an overall Master Plan for the campus and whether the strong axis through Johnson Chapel and Mead Museum would be maintained. Mr. Davies stated that there is a “district planning effort” being undertaken rather than an overall Master Plan and he did not know if the axis would be maintained.

Board members stated that it was a handsome building and Mr. Webber thanked Mr. Davies for the presentation.

V. NEW BUSINESS

A. Planning Board schedule

Board members discussed the upcoming Planning Board schedule and decided to cancel the January 2nd Planning Board meeting since there were no public hearings scheduled for that night, it would be the day after New Year's Day and people might be traveling. Other Planning Board meetings scheduled for the next month are on January 16th and January 30th.

Mr. Crouner stated that the Zoning Subcommittee and the Planning Board had a lot of work to do to prepare for Spring Town Meeting. He cautioned against taking too much time off because of the amount of work to be done.

Mr. Webber confirmed that the meeting of January 2nd would be canceled.

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

II. APPEARANCE (continued)

David Elvin, AICP, Senior Planner, PVPC – presentation regarding Transit Oriented Development

Mr. Elvin is a Land Use Planner who works on Transportation Planning as well. PVPC is involved with the sustainable Knowledge Corridor project in partnership with its sister planning agency in Hartford. They have been working on a broad Transit Oriented Development (TOD) study for the Knowledge Corridor, from the Amherst/Northampton area down to Meriden, CT. There is also a regional TOD study which contains a "suitability analysis". Mr. Elvin stated that Jonathan Tucker, Planning Director, has been working with PVPC on the regional study.

Mr. Elvin gave a detailed presentation on TOD. He showed old photographs of Springfield and Amherst with trolleys. He gave other examples of transportation planning in the area, including the new Holyoke Transportation Center.

Mr. Elvin listed characteristics of TOD:

- Mix of uses;
- High frequency transportation (every 15 minutes); any mode (rail, subway, bus);
- Different scales;
- Walkable;
- Compact;
- Public spaces where people want to linger;
- Mix of modes; bike and pedestrian friendly;
- Managed parking – flexible, relaxed standards, shared;
- Connection to other places;
- Need to be able to go somewhere – office, shopping, entertainment venue;
- Part of a corridor;
- Includes a major anchor institution.

Mr. Elvin noted that Amherst already has many of these characteristics.

The demographics of this area favor TOD. Household sizes and family compositions are different from those of a generation ago. The number of young adults and "baby boomers" in our area exceed the national average. These groups are interested in living in urban, condo developments. We also have a shortage of multi-family housing in our area.

Our area has a higher percentages of health-related, education, knowledge-sector and government jobs than other areas of the country. These types of jobs tend to cluster around transit stations.

In addition the Governor of Massachusetts has set a goal to triple the number of non-automobile trips

in the next 20 years. These trips include walking, bicycling and using public transportation. To reach this goal the state will be supporting TOD.

What is unique about Amherst that makes it suitable for TOD? There is a large younger market and older market interested in smaller homes. There is a strong rental market. There are lots of transit trips to UMass and downtown Amherst. There is a large anchor institution (UMass).

Of 30 candidate sites in the area, Amherst Center is among the top 10 TOD sites in the Valley. Four Amherst sites are in the top 20 sites in the Valley. Sites that are considered suitable for TOD in Amherst are North Amherst, Amherst Center, the intersection of West Street and Pomeroy Lane (sometimes called "Pomeroy Village") and Atkins Corner.

Currently $\frac{3}{4}$ of the trips to UMass are by single-occupancy vehicle. We should find opportunities for people to live closer to campus, to walk, bike or take public transit.

The reasons to develop TOD in Amherst include that it:

- Encourages sustainable development;
- Promotes more vibrant neighborhoods;
- Decreases municipal costs per capita;
- Improves the tax base;
- Improves environmental quality;
- Generates more transit ridership and therefore more transit revenue, thereby supporting more transit development.

A regional commitment and strong local leadership both act to support TOD.

The development density that might be expected in a transit oriented neighborhood in Amherst would be 8 to 12 units per acre.

Mr. Elvin described Transit Oriented Developments in other towns and cities that are bus-focused, referring to the Silver Line in Boston and the *CTFastrak* in Connecticut which connects New Britain with Hartford via a bus line.

There are federal and state financing tools available. The MassWorks Grant program is one such tool. The TOD Bond Program is another.

Zoning-related tools that can be used by the Planning Board to promote TOD include:

- Transit Overlay Districts
- Station Area Neighborhood Plans;
- Flexible parking standards;
- Design guidelines.

Mr. Elvin gave an example of a larger TOD development in Easton, Massachusetts, called Queset Commons. There are 280 residential units and a large retail component in this project. The developer and the town reached an agreement by which the developer paid for \$2 million worth of improvements to make the development more a part of the community.

Mr. Webber thanked Mr. Elvin for the presentation and noted that he would like to be able to take public transportation to work. He works in downtown Springfield and lives in Amherst. There is currently no feasible way for him to take public transportation that would get him downtown Springfield in a reasonable amount of time.

Mr. Crowner asked if there was a recommendation for the number of acres that would be required to make TOD successful. Mr. Elvin stated that it depends on the level of transit service available and the population density. A lower level of transit services might require a larger "catchment area". PVPC usually plans for a $\frac{1}{2}$ mile buffer around transit centers, which comes out to around 300 acres.

There was discussion about how this information could be integrated into work that the Zoning

Subcommittee and Planning Board were already working on, specifically the Village Center rezoning efforts.

Mr. Elvin offered to share information that PVPC had put together about other municipalities and the work they were doing on TOD. He noted that TOD can also be thought of as “car reduction development”.

Ms. Ford asked about the incentive to create TOD if there is not sufficient transit service. She asked “What will drive the transit companies to develop the next level of service that would support TOD?”

Mr. Elvin noted that in the past the transit companies were privately owned. They created private developments in the suburbs and built amusement parks at the end of the transit lines to encourage people to ride the transit. Now, public institutions and offices can decide to site themselves near transit lines. In some states, public office buildings are required to be sited within ½ mile of public transportation lines. He noted that the “inter-urban scale” of transit-oriented development is suited to Amherst, but Springfield may be too far to be included in a system that would serve Amherst.

Mr. Schreiber observed that the best local example of TOD is the UMass Haigis Mall where there are numerous inter-urban bus systems that stop there. He noted that it is risky to build a TOD based on bus service because bus service is subject to change. Basing TOD on a rail system is less risky.

Mr. Roznoy noted that the town is undertaking a Transportation Plan, although it has been stalled for the last few months. Ms. Brestrup explained that the Transportation Plan Task Force (TPTF) had put together an RFP and had published it. The TPTF had received one response and the members wanted to have more responses to choose from. The RFP had been revised, but (to her knowledge) it had not been sent out again.

Mr. Elvin stated that the PVPC and its sister organization in Connecticut are moving into the implementation phase of the “giant cross border transportation planning project”. This would be a good time to integrate a transportation plan from Amherst into the regional process. The PVPC may have some resources available that would help with the implementation of Amherst’s transportation plan.

There was some discussion about what it means to have a community take the lead in planning for and implementing TOD. Mr. Elvin stated that a municipality can initiate TOD projects by choosing an area where it thinks that TOD would work, by having a champion or point person to work on TOD and by working with the local transit agency and working with developers to get something started.

Mr. Tucker stated that there is nothing currently in the works; however he cited the example of the previous Town Manager who pursued a multi-modal facility on Amherst College property behind the First Congregational Church, with immediate access to Route 9, mid-way between the Depot and the Town Center. He noted that the town is working on the Central Rail Corridor project and is continuing to work on preserving and developing Amherst’s rail connections to other parts of the state and parts of Connecticut.

Mr. Schreiber noted that heavy bus ridership is actually a “double-edged sword” in that it means that people are not where they want to be. The fact that there are developments of multi-family housing in outlying areas of town presents a challenge because people have to ride buses to get to the university. A more ideal situation would be to have more density on campus or to have people living closer to the university or to their work.

Mr. Elvin noted that there is a shortage of on-campus transit services at UMass, especially with the Commonwealth College coming online. The University is working to address this problem.

Mr. Elvin also noted that Amherst is already a leader in TOD through Mr. Tucker’s participation in the TOD regional suitability analysis. The town is active at the regional level and that makes Amherst a leader.

Ms. Anderson noted that the University is trying to attract more out-of-state students. In addition,

Amherst College has many students from out of state. They want to be able to fly home. We need more and better transportation options to get people from Amherst to Bradley Airport, for students and others.

Mr. Elvin noted that the Connecticut Department of Transportation is working on a new commuter rail service from New Haven to Springfield that will include a stop in Windsor Locks. From Windsor Locks there will be a shuttle to Bradley Airport. This system should be up and running in 2 ½ to 3 years.

There was discussion about the renovation of Union Station in Springfield and whether there would be improved public transit to get people from Amherst to Springfield. Union Station will provide service to Amtrak, Peter Pan and Greyhound Bus Lines, the PVTA and local pedestrian and vehicular traffic. There are currently no plans to improve the links between Union Station and surrounding communities. Mr. Elvin noted that the development around Union Station would be a real TOD development.

Mr. Tucker stated that there may, in the future, be improved rail service between Amherst and points south, connecting with points east and west. He also stated that there are discussions going on about how to improve transit service between Amherst Center and the new Amtrak Station in Northampton.

IV. OLD BUSINESS

- A.** SPR2010-00012 – Patrick Kamins – 321 Main Street – review of minor changes to site plan
- Patrick Kamins of Kamins Real Estate presented the proposed changes to the site plan for 321 Main Street. The zoning of the property was changed a few years ago to make it more suitable for commercial uses. Part of the plan was to pave the parking lot. This has now been accomplished. After paving the parking lot it became apparent that the proposed fence might not be the best choice. The Planning Board had commented that it wanted to see more planting on the site. In addition the previous Building Commissioner had been concerned about people cutting through from Main Street to Dickinson. She wanted to block this cut through. Planters are a nicer option than the proposed fence because they will provide space for plantings. The proposed planters are large enough so that they cannot be moved.

The owners of Wheatberry would like to plant and maintain the planters.

The original plan had a bike rack located in the area that was to be surrounded by the fence. The proposed location for the bike rack has been moved around the corner to the west side of the building, out of the way of the parking lot and out of the line of sight of the tenants of the building.

Wheatberry may wish to have outdoor dining in the future in the area proposed to be surrounded by the planters. They will be responsible for applying for that permit.

The paving is complete; the lining is complete; the dumpster pad is complete.

Mr. Kamins is requesting to move the bike rack location and to replace the fence with planters.

Mr. Webber noted that these items corresponded with Conditions 1, 5 and 7 of the Decision for SPR2012-00012.

Mr. Carson asked about the slope of the proposed seating area and whether a platform would need to be built. He also expressed concern about the heat that would be generated by the asphalt paving for people seated out there.

Mr. Kamins stated that Wheatberry would apply for outdoor seating. The seating would need to be kept close to the parking space marked as #15 on the plan, but that there was adequate flat space there for seating. The planters will keep cars out of the potential seating area.

Mr. Roznoy asked whether these changes being brought to the Board were in response to the conditions. Mr. Kamins stated that he was responding to the conditions of the decision in stages, with the paving being the first thing to be done. The next step was the fence (now proposed to be planters). The bike rack will be close to parking space #7, close to the frame shop and out of the way of cars. The planters will be round as shown in the catalog cuts rather than square as shown on the plan.

There was discussion about whether the white lines at the northwest corner of the parking lot were necessary. Mr. Kamins stated that he preferred not to paint the lines. Mr. Crowner asked if the bike rack would be vulnerable to being driven into by cars or trucks.

Ms. Brestrup noted that the striped area was proposed in response to the grocery store that had been in the building. The grocery store had deliveries by large trucks. The striped area was proposed as a place for the trucks to sit while they were unloading. The current tenants do not have deliveries by large trucks. The striped area may no longer be needed.

Mr. Kamins stated that the bike rack will be placed between the wheel-stops and the building wall which will protect it from being hit by cars.

Mr. Webber noted that it was still the fall of 2012, when the conditions were required to be fulfilled and he stated that the Board was being asked to sign off on Conditions 1, 5 and 7.

Mr. O'Keeffe MOVED that the Board accept the revisions to the site plan as satisfying the Conditions 1, 5 and 7 of Site Plan Review decision SPR2010-00012. Mr. Roznoy seconded and the vote was 8-0.

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

III. TOWN MEETING

A. Discussion about Fall Special Town Meeting – Mr. Webber observed that Fall Special Town Meeting had been a great success. The Planning Board had had several articles on the warrant that were received positively and were passed. The Planning Board received praise for listening to citizens' concerns and acting on them. He thanked all of the Planning Board members for their hard work. He stated that it had been a pleasure working with the Board members this fall.

Ms. Anderson noted that the ZSC had done the lions' share of the work and she praised the ZSC members including Ms. Kruger who was unable to attend tonight's meeting.

Ms. Ford and Mr. Webber praised the new format of the Planning Board meetings, which provides an opportunity for Board members to discuss the work of the ZSC at the beginning of the meeting and hear from citizens. They would like to continue this format.

Mr. Tucker noted that the Planning Board members all receive the materials that will be discussed by the Zoning Subcommittee at each meeting.

Mr. Crowner announced that the semi-annual Zoning Forum would be held by the ZSC on December 19th, with the approval of the Planning Board. Board members were invited to attend.

Mr. O'Keeffe stated that he would like the Board to have an opportunity to offer feedback on the prioritization of zoning articles for Spring Town Meeting. He stated that January 16th would be a good time for the discussion of priorities.

Mr. Crowner stated that the ZSC was interested in having a full discussion of TDR at one of its meetings in January. There would be an opportunity to reflect on the

Zoning Forum at another meeting in January.

Mr. Roznoy stated that now that the town has made some progress in dealing with rental housing issues via zoning amendments, the town should deal with the need for more housing in town. He agreed with Niels la Cour's comments at Town Meeting to the effect that many of the housing problems in Amherst stem from the fact that the town hasn't dealt with the issues of rental housing and affordable housing in a number of years. He encouraged the Board to bring back proposals for North Amherst and the Gateway area to help to increase the number of housing units in town. This effort should coincide with the proposal for new rental registration, inspection and permitting system.

Mr. Webber agreed with the priorities outlined for TDR and for affordable and student housing.

Mr. Carson stated that there is a need to look for sites for private student housing, both on and off campus.

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

VI. FORM A (ANR) SUBDIVISION APPLICATIONS – none

VII. UPCOMING ZBA APPLICATIONS – The Planning Board declined to review the following applications:

ZBA FY2013-00010 – GP Amherst, LLC – For a Special Permit to construct additions to two single family dwellings to create Town House buildings for a total of 6 six units at 60-62 & 64-66 Railroad Street (*to be withdrawn*)

ZBA FY2013-00011 – Patricia Stacey c/o The Sunset-Pleasant Association – To Appeal the issuance of a building permit to demolish an existing accessory structure (barn) at 290 Lincoln Avenue

ZBA FY2013-00012 – Grandonico Properties, LLC - To Appeal a portion of the order of the Building Commissioner suggesting that the property owner may be fined for a violation of the Zoning Bylaw relating to more than four unrelated occupants, at Gilreath Manor, 28, 32, 34, 36, 40 & 46 Hobart Lane.

ZBA FY2013-00013 – James Lumley & Barbara Hawley – For a Special Permit to change the use of a dimensionally non-conforming building to professional offices at 24 Dickinson Street

Mr. Schreiber asked about the ZBA case related to 179 Northampton Road that the Planning Board had asked to review. Ms. Brestrup stated that the case was currently scheduled for Planning Board review on December 19th, but that this date was in doubt. The Design Review Board had recommended redesign of the project and the proponents may wish to delay the Planning Board's review order to have time to work on the redesign.

VIII. UPCOMING SPP/SPR/SUB APPLICATIONS – see Report of Staff

IX. PLANNING BOARD COMMITTEE & LIAISON REPORTS

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission – Stephen Schreiber reported that the PVPC would meet next week. The focus of the discussion would be the Community Preservation Act. He invited Ms. Anderson, the Planning Board's rep on CPAC, to attend the meeting.

Community Preservation Act Committee – Sandra Anderson reported that CPAC would meet tomorrow night. The purpose of the meeting would be to discuss new proposals in preparation for Spring Town Meeting. All of the items listed in Article 8 of the Fall Town Meeting Warrant had

passed. She reported that the grant that had been applied for from the state for the North portion of the Amherst Common was not awarded to Amherst. Therefore the money that had been recommended by CPAC and approved by Town Meeting for that project (\$159,000) would not be used at this time, but will probably be included in a new request for Spring Town Meeting, as matching funds for a grant application to be submitted in the next round of applications. Ms. Anderson clarified that money that is in the CPAC fund stays with CPAC until it is used.

Agricultural Commission – David Webber reported that the Ag Com has been meeting and continuing to talk about promoting farmers' markets and regional markets. They have also been talking about the need for local processing facilities to package their goods so that they can be sold beyond the growing season and sold to markets that are not local. The Ag Com has also been working on developing a new work plan and a set of priorities.

Transportation Plan Task Force – Richard Roznoy and Rob Crouner – Mr. Roznoy reported that the TPTF had not met recently and not much is happening. He requested that staff schedule a meeting to get the Task Force back on track. He noted that the Task Force does not have a chair, but relies on town staff.

Amherst Redevelopment Authority – Constance Kruger – no report

Design Review Board – Kathleen Ford reported that the DRB had met on October 30th and had reviewed plans for 179 Northampton Road. The DRB had asked for more information about the project. They had questions about massing and whether the project fit into the neighborhood. Ms. Ford had missed the most recent meeting and was therefore not able to report on that.

Housing and Sheltering Committee – Constance Kruger – no report

Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods Working Group (SHNWG) – Sandra Anderson reported that the new Working Group is up and running with around 15 to 17 members. It meets weekly, on Tuesdays at 3:00 p.m. in the Town Room. The next meeting is December 18th. The Group is looking for a student and a faculty member to round out the membership. The Group is researching rental policies elsewhere, in communities that are similar to Amherst, with large college populations, like Penn State and UConn. A group of regular audience members/attendees listens to the discussions.

Mr. Webber noted that he sits on the Advisory Board for Student Legal Services at UMass. He had just attended a meeting and mentioned the work being done by SHNWG. The students were interested to hear that the town was doing something about bad landlords who rent substandard units and rent illegally. Students could be an ally to the town in dealing with problem absentee landlords. He encouraged students to attend the SHNWG meetings.

Ms. Anderson announced that the next meetings would be on December 18th and January 8th, 15th and 22nd. The meeting on the 22nd would be a Public Forum held in the evening at 7:00 p.m. There will be another Public Forum in February. SHNWG will need to finish its work by the beginning of March in order to have a warrant article ready for Spring Town Meeting.

Ms. Anderson invited members of the Planning Board who have ideas about rental registration and permitting to send her their comments through staff. Mr. O'Keefe noted that there is already a page for the Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods Working Group on the town website.

X. REPORT OF THE CHAIR – none

XI. REPORT OF STAFF – Ms. Brestrup reported that the application for Site Plan Review for 42 Shumway Street would be withdrawn as a result of the change in the Zoning Bylaw. She also reported that the Planning Board would be reviewing a proposal for a non-profit take-out café to be located at 768 North Pleasant Street at their upcoming meeting on December 19th.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Approved:

Christine M. Brestrup,
Senior Planner

_____ DATE: _____
David Webber, Chair