

AMHERST PLANNING BOARD
Wednesday, July 29, 2015 – 7:00 PM
Town Room, Town Hall
MINUTES

PRESENT: David Webber, Chair, Stephen Schreiber, Rob Crouner, Bruce Carson, Greg Stutsman, Richard Roznoy and Pari Riahi

ABSENT: none

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

Mr. Webber opened the meeting at 7:02 PM.

I. MINUTES

Mr. Carson MOVED to approve the Minutes of July 15, 2015. Mr. Stutsman seconded and the vote was 7-0-0.

Mr. Roznoy MOVED to approve the Minutes of June 18, 2014. Mr. Stutsman seconded and the vote was 5-0-2 (Schreiber and Riahi abstained).

Mr. Carson MOVED to approve the Minutes of July 9, 2014. Mr. Schreiber seconded and the vote was 5-0-2 (Stutsman and Riahi abstained).

Mr. Roznoy noted ironically that it was refreshing to hear so many people express strong support for Inclusionary Zoning in these minutes from the summer of 2014, when many of those same people had spoken against the final zoning amendment when it was presented to the 2015 Annual Town Meeting.

Mr. Roznoy MOVED to approve the Minutes of July 30, 2014. Mr. Stutsman seconded and the vote was 6-0-1 (Riahi abstained).

II. ZONING

- A.** Zoning Subcommittee Report – Mr. Crouner reported that the ZSC has a lot on its plate. It has for the time being put off discussion on how to conduct the process of zoning amendments and is proceeding as it has in the past. However, the ZSC may adjust its process in the future. The ZSC has a lot of high and medium priority zoning amendments on its agenda. There are only a few that might be brought to Fall Town Meeting. These include an amendment to the use category for “Commercial parking lot or parking garage” that would involve dividing that use category into two: Parking lot and Parking structure. Currently both types of private parking facilities require a Special Permit in the B-G zoning district. The proposal is to allow Commercial Parking Lots in the B-G zoning district by right with Site Plan Review, in order to make existing private parking more available. The parking forums showed that private lots can be put to better use. We may wish to include design standards in the requirements. Allowing this change may help the parking situation.

The ZSC is also working on a revision to the mixed-use buildings standards and conditions in response to the 2015 Annual Town Meeting petition article, including expanding existing standards and conditions for mixed-use buildings in the downtown by borrowing language from the regulations in the Commercial district. The standards and conditions would establish requirements governing the balance of residential to non-residential uses and the location of residential uses in mixed-use buildings. The

changes that are being developed may extend to all ‘center’ zones where mixed-use buildings are allowed.

Mr. Crouner reported that the ZSC is also considering an amendment currently titled “Limited Occupancy Apartments” which would limit the maximum number of bedrooms in apartments and limit the number of unrelated adults to no more than two in some districts.

The ZSC also discussed an amendment that would allow some small non-conforming lots to become buildable, and an amendment regarding multi-family apartments.

The ZSC is also interested in the idea of regulating rental situations and limiting rental by the bedroom and defining academic rental uses. There is a proposal to create a new residential development method for academic residential uses that would require an overlay district and would be allowed under certain conditions. There was discussion about restricting rentals by the room or bed in the residential rental property bylaw rather than in zoning.

Mr. Stutsman, who had drafted the Limited Occupancy Apartments amendment, stated that it would be an alternative to the existing apartment category and would focus on the number of bedrooms. There has been concern about apartments with a high bedroom count. This amendment would allow only studios, one-bedroom and two bedroom apartments in apartment buildings in the downtown area.

B. Public Comment Period – none

The Board noted that there was only a limited number of Planning Board meetings (4) before the warrant language is due.

Mr. Webber noted that he was inclined to support the proposed amendment regarding parking lots, permitting commercial (private) parking lots by Site Plan Review rather than Special Permit in the downtown and village centers.

III. OLD BUSINESS

A. North Amherst Village Center Intersection – (Sunderland Road/Montague Road) – debriefing on public forum #1

Ms. Brestrup gave a summary of the activities at the public forum held on June 24th and suggested that the Planning Board take some time to discuss the four concept plans presented at that forum and consider which plans it thinks work better and would like to see presented for community discussion at the upcoming fall forum.

Mr. Crouner noted that the Planning Board’s reason for being involved with this project is because of the long-range effect of the intersection’s redesign on future development of the Village Center. In discussing the four concepts the Board should consider how the realignments would affect the Village Center. There is an expressed desire to consolidate and build up the civic core, with emphasis on the library, school, field and church and parish house. Concept D puts the library on the same side of the road as the school and field and focuses attention on the shops. It supports the functioning core of the Village Center. Mr. Carson agreed with Mr. Crouner’s comments and expressed support for Concept D, as well.

Mr. Schreiber described the issue as both an urban design problem and a traffic problem and stated that the goal should be to create a vibrant urban area. He stated that Concept A is not a bad option since it gives frontage to the shopping plaza. Concept C

isolates the shopping plaza. He noted his preferences against building “zigzag” routes and for concepts where the major routes are simple and continuous.

Mr. Carson noted that Concept B, with one-way streets, seems to reduce long-term benefits for businesses.

Mr. Stutsman expressed a preference for Concept D since it would unite the library and the playing field. This concept also keeps a highly trafficked route [Route 63/ Montague Road] close to the shopping area.

Mr. Webber expressed strong support for Concept D. He lives in North Amherst and drives through the intersection regularly. Concept D formalizes what people are already doing. It places the library and playing field together and would provide a nice improvement for traffic flow and the Village Center.

Mr. Schreiber expressed support for Concepts A and D, without the rotary [roundabout], which he felt would be too confusing.

This spurred discussion of a roundabout. Mr. Roznoy supported the construction of a roundabout, but he noted that several of the concepts show roadways going right over places where existing buildings currently stand.

Mr. Tucker stated that the concepts are broad design options, and do not include specifics. Both Concepts B and C run through existing buildings. The location of the intersection is important in terms of the future character of the Village Center. Concepts A and D can be surrounded by uses. He noted that Superintendent of Public Works had expressed the opinion that Concept A would not work from a traffic standpoint.

Mr. Roznoy said that taking property would make a roundabout more feasible. Ms. Brestrup noted that there had been public comment at the public forum in support of a roundabout incorporated into Concept D.

Mr. Carson expressed some support for the possibility of a roundabout because pedestrians would have fewer lanes to cross than with a standard intersection.

Mr. Schreiber expressed concern about the prospect of having a curb cut directly off a roundabout serving a commercial property such as the shopping plaza.

There was discussion about roundabouts as they are used in Europe. Mr. Tucker observed that if buildings and sidewalks can be built right up to the roundabout edge, then the intersection would be properly enclosed.

Mr. Webber said he thought that a signalized intersection would work better [in concert with Concept D]. In Concept D a roundabout wouldn't work as well with the shopping plaza.

Jacqueline Maidana and Janet Keller commented on roundabouts in terms of what works and what doesn't work.

There was further discussion about roundabouts and where they work well. Size and scale matter in terms of how well they work and whether they fit in a village center.

Ms. Keller recommended trying to get a grant to improve the look of the shopping plaza.

Ms. Brestrup stated that the Planning Department staff would write up a summary of what was learned at the public forum on June 24th and that another public forum would be held in the fall to discuss refined concepts for the intersection.

- B.** Downtown Parking Report – Acknowledge receipt of draft report – Mr. Webber acknowledged receipt of the report. Mr. Crouner praised the report for how well it captured the issues and solutions to the issues. The report made it clear that a lot of small things can be done to improve the current situation. The ZSC feels less pressure now to come up with a zoning amendment on parking in the downtown in the short term.

Mr. Webber supported the idea of reconstituting a parking commission. He noted that the Select Board has parking as one of its high priorities. There are a lot of great ideas in the parking report.

Mr. Schreiber agreed that it was an excellent report. He said that Amherst is at a turning point. If we want a viable, dense downtown we need a big project to deal with parking. We need infrastructure. He made an analogy to on-site septic systems and wells. Most houses are connected to town sewer and water, which is operated as a town facility. We need a similar type of approach to parking in the downtown, in the form of a large centralized facility. Just as downtown businesses are not expected to have their own on-site septic systems and wells, they should not be expected to provide their own parking. We should examine the winter ban on on-street parking. Many towns ban on-street parking only when there is a threat of snow.

Ms. Brestrup stated that a joint meeting with the Select Board and the Transportation Task Force would be scheduled for the fall.

Mr. Webber noted that previous successful efforts, such as the Town Gown Steering Committee, Puffer's Pond 2020 and the Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods effort, which developed the Rental Registration Bylaw, all followed similar processes to deal with issues of concern to the community.

Mr. Webber recommended the creation of a Parking Task Force with specifically outlined goals. It would be better to move forward in a cohesive and planned way than to work on things in a piecemeal manner.

John Fox of Precinct 10 asked for data on the Boltwood Parking Garage. What are the revenues and what were the costs to construct it and the costs of operation? He would like to see a public report of annual revenues and costs and an assessment of how the current parking garage is working. Before we decide to build a new garage we should think about who will pay for it – the federal government, the state government, citizens of town? How many cars do we need to park? What kind of revenue would it generate? What would be the percentage of use? He recommended that a pro-forma be developed before we decide to build a garage.

Mr. Webber reported that there is now a report on town-owned buildings, which provides an inventory of buildings that the town owns.

Mr. Tucker stated that it would be useful to look at the relative value of the Boltwood Walk Parking Garage, not only in terms of revenues versus costs, but in terms of increased property taxes, meals taxes, etc., resulting from redevelopment spurred by the presence of the garage. He stated that it could be a coordinated effort among departments, but that the task could be overseen by the new Director of Economic Development.

Ms. Riahi asked about what would happen to existing parking lots if a centralized parking lot were built. She speculated that if we had a new structure, some of the existing lots might not be used as fully and those properties would then be available for development.

Mr. Schreiber stated that this might provide an opportunity for increasing the tax base.

Ms. Riahi concluded that we could anticipate redevelopment of some existing private parking lots if a garage is built.

Mr. Webber stated that the Planning Board would wait for an invitation from the Select Board to schedule a joint meeting on parking.

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

IV. NEW BUSINESS

- A. Election of Officers and Planning Board Reorganization – Mr. Webber explained that the Board would be electing officers and nominating representatives to committees.

Planning Board Officers

Mr. Schreiber MOVED to nominate Mr. Webber as Chair of the Planning Board. Mr. Roznoy seconded and the vote was 7-0-0 to elect Mr. Webber as Chair.

Mr. Carson MOVED to nominate Mr. Schreiber as Vice-chair of the Planning Board. Mr. Stutsman seconded and the vote was 7-0-0 to elect Mr. Schreiber as Vice-Chair.

Mr. Carson MOVED to nominate Mr. Stutsman as Clerk of the Planning Board. Mr. Schreiber seconded and the vote was 7-0-0 to elect Mr. Stutsman as Clerk.

PVPC Representative

Mr. Stutsman MOVED to nominate Mr. Carson as the Planning Board's representative to the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission. Ms. Riahi seconded and the vote was 7-0-0 to elect Mr. Carson as PVPC representative.

CPAC Representative

Mr. Roznoy, the current CPAC representative, stated that his role on the Planning Board would be limited in the coming months. He described CPAC's typical schedule of meetings.

Ms. Riahi MOVED to nominate herself as the Planning Board's CPAC representative. Mr. Schreiber seconded and the vote was 7-0-0.

Agricultural Commission

Mr. Schreiber MOVED to nominate himself as the Planning Board's Ag Com representative. Mr. Carson seconded and the vote was 7-0-0.

Mr. Webber noted the passing away of long-time Commission member, Pat Wagner, and stated that the Commission would feel her loss.

Transportation Task Force

Mr. Roznoy stated that he would no longer be serving on the TTF. It would be good to have two members from each of the three bodies – Planning Board, Public Works Committee and Public Transportation, Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee.

Mr. Roznoy MOVED to nominate Mr. Crowner as the Planning Board's representative to the TTF. Mr. Carson seconded and the vote was 7-0-0.

Amherst Redevelopment Authority

No nomination was made at this time. The ARA is not active now, but Mr. Tucker will give the Board notice if an ARA meeting is called.

Design Review Board

No nomination was made at this time. Ms. Brestrup reported that the DRB has a new member, Catharine Porter, and now has enough members to have a quorum and hold a meeting.

Housing and Sheltering Committee

Mr. Stutsman, Co-chair of the HSC, MOVED to nominate himself as the Planning Board's representative to the HSC.

He reported that the HSC needs one more member. Ms. Riahi expressed her interest in serving on the committee and will submit a Citizen Activity Form to be considered for membership.

Mr. Carson seconded and the vote was 7-0-0 to elect Mr. Stutsman as the Planning Board's representative.

Zoning Subcommittee

Mr. Carson nominated himself, Mr. Crowner, Mr. Schreiber and Mr. Stutsman as members of the ZSC and nominated Mr. Crowner as Chair of the ZSC. Mr. Stutsman seconded and the vote was 7-0-0.

Mr. Webber thanked all of the Planning Board members for another year of work on the Planning Board.

B. Planning Board's Summer Schedule

The Planning Board decided not to meet on August 5th. The next Planning Board meeting will be August 19th.

C. Topics not reasonably anticipated 48 hours prior to the meeting – Mr. Webber noted that the Board members had received a copy of an interesting article on “walkable streets”, which had been published on the website of citylab.com. He summarized the article as follows:

A study was done in New York City analyzing what made successful, walkable streets. There were three things that were shown to contribute to walkable streets:

- Active uses such as high-traffic buildings or fixtures
- Street furniture or items such as tables, benches, bus stops, etc.
- First-floor windows

V. FORM A (ANR) SUBDIVISION APPLICATIONS – none

VI. UPCOMING ZBA APPLICATIONS – none

VII. UPCOMING SPP/SPR/SUB APPLICATIONS – none

VIII. PLANNING BOARD COMMITTEE & LIAISON REPORTS – no reports

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission – Bruce Carson

Community Preservation Act Committee – Pari Riahi

Agricultural Commission – Stephen Schreiber

Transportation Task Force – Rob Crowner

Amherst Redevelopment Authority – vacant

Design Review Board – vacant

Housing and Sheltering Committee – Greg Stutsman

Zoning Subcommittee – Rob Crowner, Bruce Carson, Greg Stutsman and Stephen Schreiber

IX. REPORT OF THE CHAIR – no report

X. REPORT OF STAFF – no report

XI. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:26 PM.

Respectfully submitted:

Approved:

Christine M. Brestrup
Senior Planner

David Webber, Chair

DATE: _____