

AMHERST PLANNING BOARD
Wednesday, September 16, 2015 – 7:00 PM
Town Room, Town Hall
MINUTES

PRESENT: David Webber, Chair, Stephen Schreiber, Rob Crowner, Bruce Carson, and Greg Stutsman, Pari Riahi, and Christine Gray-Mullen

ABSENT: Richard Roznoy

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

Mr. Webber opened the meeting at 7:03 PM.

I. MINUTES

Mr. Stutsman MOVED to approve the Minutes of September 2, 2015. Mr. Carson seconded and the vote was 5-0-2 (Riahi and Gray-Mullen abstained).

Mr. Stutsman MOVED to approve the Minutes of September 17, 2014. Mr. Carson seconded and the vote was 4-0-3 (Riahi, Gray-Mullen and Schreiber abstained).

II. PUBLIC HEARINGS – ZONING AMENDMENTS

A-01-16 Zoning – Parking Lots and Structures (Planning Board)

To see if the Town will amend Section 3.384, Parking Facilities, of the Zoning Bylaw to: 1) redefine the use categories for parking lots and structures, and 2) to change the permit requirements for the revised use categories.

Mr. Webber read the preamble and opened the public hearing. He announced that there would be no public hearing because the Planning Board had decided not to bring this article forward at this time.

Mr. Stutsman MOVED to close the public hearing. Mr. Carson seconded and the vote was 7-0-0.

It was not yet time for the next public hearing so the Board turned to New Business.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

E. Topics not reasonably anticipated 48 hours prior to the meeting

Amherst College, Renovation of Existing Baseball Field – ED Zoning District

In accordance with the requirements of Section 3.211 of the Zoning Bylaw, Peter Root, Director of Operations/Facilities for Amherst College, presented plans for the renovation of the existing baseball field at Amherst College. The College would like to do the work this fall and have it ready for use in the spring. The field is located behind the Alumni Gymnasium and Orr Rink. It has not been renovated in many years. The College has received a donation to do a major renovation including replacing the fencing, constructing new dugouts and a small press box. Structures will be faced with brick and will have either metal or slate or faux slate roofs. There will be some grading on the field and work in the infield. The existing backstops will be moving 15 feet away from the wetland area to the south of the ballfield. The College has contacted the Conservation Commission and there appear to be no issues related to wetlands.

Mr. Root asked the Board if the town could waive the 60 day period that is required by Section 3.211.

Mr. Schreiber MOVED to waive the 60 day requirement and to take no exception to the plans for improvement of the baseball field. Mr. Carson seconded and the vote was 7-0-0.

Mr. Webber thanked Mr. Root for his presentation.

II. ZONING

- A.** Zoning Subcommittee Report – Mr. Crowner reported that the Planning Board would not be holding public hearings this evening. The ZSC had been working on zoning amendments related to parking. However, the proposed amendments were not accomplishing what the ZSC thought they were supposed to accomplish.

The ZSC is studying parking and discussing what should be required, how existing parking can be managed more efficiently and looking at parking in other centers, like the village centers. The ZSC is continuing to discuss these issues and waiting for a consultation with the Select Board.

The ZSC would like to update the data that we have on parking [update the parking study that was done by PVPC] so we have a base line to work from.

The ZSC is also working on revising standards and conditions for mixed use buildings and projects downtown. A certain amount of non-residential use should be included in mixed use buildings and the location within the building of the non-residential uses is being discussed. The ZSC is hoping to have something ready for spring Town Meeting.

The ZSC is also looking at the dimensional table for the B-L zoning district. B-L and COM are currently intertwined in the dimensional table, but they are two different zones. A problem with the B-L district has been pointed out by a local architect as well as by the BID. To build new residential uses in the B-L zoning district a land owner would need a large parcel of land. Mixed-use buildings are not easy to develop in the B-L district. The ZSC is working on separating the B-L and COM zoning districts and possibly applying different dimensional standards to each.

Mr. Tucker reported that UTAC [University and Town of Amherst Collaborative] has been formed. Members of the Planning Board are now members of the Housing and Economic Development Subcommittees of UTAC. There will also be a Culture, Arts and Living Subcommittee. There may be a need for the town to amend the Zoning Bylaw to allow more cultural events to occur.

V. OLD BUSINESS

- A.** North Downtown Streetscape Design Elements – Update – Ms. Brestrup explained that she had received input from the Design Review Board on the street and pedestrian lighting for the North Downtown area. The topic had also been discussed with the Public Works Committee. Guilford Mooring, Superintendent of Public Works, had stated that he could obtain a lighting plan for the North Downtown area from the lighting manufacturers, Holophane.

Mr. Tucker reported that a member of the Public Works Committee had raised the issue of the color of lights that might be used for the North Downtown area. Filters of tinted lenses could be added to the lights to counteract the blue cast of LED lighting.

Mr. Webber stated that he supported the idea of obtaining a lighting plan showing the location of lights and the lumen pattern.

Vince O'Connor of Precinct 1 spoke in support of the Planning Board's work on street lighting and made the following comments:

- People are concerned about lights shining into their windows at night;
- Street lights in some areas are completely shielded;
- Street lights should shine on the ground, not into the eyes of pedestrians or drivers;
- Make sure that the source of illumination is not visible.

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

II. PUBLIC HEARINGS – ZONING AMENDMENTS (continued)

A-02-16 Zoning – Parking Design Standards (Planning Board)

To see if the Town will amend Section 7.1, Design Standards and Landscape Standards, with respect to design standards for parking facilities and associated properties.

Mr. Webber read the preamble and opened the public hearing and explained that the public hearing would not be proceeding because the Planning Board had decided not to put forward this amendment.

Mr. Stutsman MOVED to close the public hearing. Mr. Carson seconded and the vote was 7-0-0.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

- A.** Hazard Mitigation Plan – renewal of existing plan – Ms. Brestrup explained that work was proceeding on the renewal of the town's Hazard Mitigation Plan. Work on this plan renewal was being led by Chief Tim Nelson of the Fire Department with the help of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission. It is possible that the Planning Board will be called upon to participate in this effort by naming a representative to the group that is working on the Plan. The Hazard Mitigation Plan deals primarily with response to natural disasters.
- B.** Article on New Housing Projects in New Haven, CT – The Board acknowledged receipt of this article. Mr. Crouner noted that the units that were being built were one and two bedroom units.
- C.** Hadley Route 9 Corridor Improvement – Public Information Meeting – Ms. Brestrup reported that she had been attending meetings at MassDOT District 2 offices in Northampton on the topic of planned improvements to the Route 9 corridor between Amherst and the Coolidge Bridge. The planning process for this project grew out of the work that MassDOT did on a feasibility study for a new river crossing. MassDOT is proposing pedestrian and bicycle improvements for Route 9, along with improvements to serve vehicles. It is also studying the possibility of incorporating BRT (Bus Rapid Transit). A public meeting will be held at Hopkins Academy in Hadley, on September 29, from 6:00 to 8:30 p.m. for a public presentation by MassDOT and to receive public comments on the project.
- D.** Planning Board – Fall Schedule – The Planning Board decided to meet on September 30th, for the purpose of signing the decision for the Mill River Baseball Fields and to discuss zoning amendments. The Board will cancel its meeting on October 7th. Mr. Tucker will staff the September 30th meeting.
- E.** Topics not reasonably anticipated 48 hours prior to the meeting

III. PUBLIC HEARINGS – SITE PLAN REVIEW

SPR2016-00001 – Town of Amherst – Mill River Recreation Area – 95 Montague Road

Request Site Plan Review approval under Section 3.335 of the Zoning Bylaw to construct improvements to baseball fields 1 and 2, including replacement of infield soil and sod, replacement of two batting cages, construction of four new dugouts to replace existing dugouts, installation of associated utilities, replacement of pedestrian and vehicle gates at fields 1 and 2, and other landscape alterations (Map 5A/126, R-N/FPC zoning district)

Mr. Webber read the preamble and opened the public hearing.

Nate Malloy, Senior Planner with the Amherst Planning Department, presented the application. He was accompanied by Jonathan Kane, President of Amherst Baseball.

Mr. Malloy explained that Amherst Baseball had applied for a grant of CPA funds. The grant was approved by Town Meeting. He explained the priorities for work to be done on the fields and explained that when Amherst Baseball had applied for the funds they had not accounted for the need to pay prevailing wage. Therefore the amount of money (\$127,000) may not be enough to accomplish all of the desired improvements. Priorities are as follows:

Priority #1 – Remove existing infield soil, excavate 6” for Ballfield #1 and 12” for Ballfield #2, install sand for drainage, professionally grade the fields;

Priority #2 – Replace the dugouts; dugouts to consist of chain link fence with a 12’ x 20’ canopy in season; the dugouts will provide shade and protection for the players and help them to focus on the game; the contract is out to bid at this time;

Priority #3 – Replace batting cages; four metal arches with netting top and sides; taken down in the off-season;

Priority #4 – Water line from pool area – spigot near backstop to water fields and fill water bottles; to be contained in locked box and available during games;

Priority #5 – 20 Amp Electrical Service – for PA system or music during games;

Priority #6 – Gates for pedestrians and vehicles for access into field area.

All of these improvements are meant to serve Little League as it is currently played at Mill River. Games are played during the day.

The Fire Department asked about the width of the gates, specifically about clearance for emergency vehicles. The posts and footings for the gates will not be moved. The gateway clearance is currently 9’-6”. The Fire Department is satisfied.

The work can probably be completed in 3 to 4 weeks. It will provide conditions that are safer and more enjoyable for players.

Mr. Webber reviewed the Site Visit Report for the site visit that had occurred that morning. There were no questions.

Mr. Webber asked about the relationship between Amherst Baseball and the Town of Amherst.

Mr. Malloy stated that the Mill River Recreation Area is a town-owned property. The process for constructing the site improvements has been conducted according to public procurement requirements. Amherst Baseball has an MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) with the town to use the fields. The conditions of the MOU are that Amherst Baseball agrees to maintain the fields. In return the town allows Amherst Baseball to use the fields. The Town of Amherst is taking the lead in the Site Plan Review application process, but the Town has received input

from Amherst Baseball because Amherst Baseball knows more about the site improvements that are needed.

Mr. Kane stated that Amherst Baseball had made the application to CPAC for the funds. The town was willing to participate and has control over the fields.

Mr. Webber stated that the plans were straightforward.

Melissa Perot of 15 Summer Street offered the following comments:

- Expressed support for the proposed improvements to the fields;
- Questioned the permanency of the dugouts and the other structures and asked if they could be installed and removed seasonally;
- Noted that the permanent structures restrict the use of the area to just baseball;
- Expressed concern about the creation of an attractive nuisance; people climbing on the structures, graffiti and trash and inappropriate use of dugouts;
- Asked Board to consider requiring temporary structures that can be taken down off-season rather than permanent ones.

Mr. Malloy described the dugouts further. They will be open, transparent structures with black vinyl coated chain link fence enclosures. They will not be sunk below grade. The shade roofs can be taken down off-season. They can be locked. The current dugouts consist of benches behind 2 panels of 16' high chain link fence. There will be no wood sides or windows.

Mr. Webber asked whether the space would be entirely dedicated to baseball.

Mr. Malloy stated that people will be able to use the fields outside of baseball hours.

Mr. Kane noted that the new dugouts are a reconfiguration of what was originally proposed. Amherst Baseball listened to the concerns of citizens with regard to the creation of an attractive nuisance and redesigned the dugouts to be more transparent.

Mr. Malloy stated that it would take a lot of work, time, and effort to take down the structures after every game. The tarps that are proposed for the sides of the dugouts can be taken down after the baseball season is over.

Mr. Kane noted that the new dugouts will be safer, with chain link fence on all sides. The balls hit the fences hard and the dugouts will protect the players.

Mr. Carson stated that the proposed canopies will be the same as those used in the pool area and that they are very attractive.

Vince O'Connor of Precinct 1 made several comments:

- There should be a sign that directs people to the Mill River Recreation Area;
- There is an existing sign but it is not very effective;
- The entryway is limited and the existing sign is not in good repair; it is easy to miss the entry;
- The driveway has problems and it needs repair as well;
- An additional sign might help, especially if it were placed before the bridge, to warn people of the upcoming recreation area;
- A sign that lists the time of baseball games might be good; it may encourage customers of Atkins to attend games;
- Consider a more attractive sign or signs, placed so as to be viewed from both directions.

There was further discussion about signs. Ms. Brestrup reported that the town is working on a wayfinding sign system for downtown. The BID and the town applied for a grant from the state

to do this work. The hope is that the downtown wayfinding sign system can be expanded to include outlying areas such as Mill River Recreation Area.

Mr. Schreiber MOVED to close the public hearing. Mr. Stutsman seconded and the vote was 6-0-1 (Crownier abstained).

There were no questions from the Board and no objections to the proposed project. The Board set no conditions.

Mr. Schreiber MOVED to approve the Site Plan Review application with the requested waivers because it meets the criteria set forth in Section 11.24 of the Zoning Bylaw. Mr. Stutsman seconded and the vote was 7-0-0.

VII. FORM A (ANR) SUBDIVISION APPLICATIONS – none

VIII. UPCOMING ZBA APPLICATIONS – The Board declined to review the following:

ZBA FY2016-00005 – Truman Likens – For a Special Permit to formalize the use of the property as two dwelling units, as a non-owner occupied Converted Dwelling, under Section 3.3241 of the Zoning Bylaw, at 120 Belchertown Road

IX. UPCOMING SPP/SPR/SUB APPLICATIONS – Ms. Brestrup reported on the following upcoming Site Plan Review applications:

- Repair of porches at 61-63 Main Street
- Installation of an exhaust hood at the First Baptist Church on North Pleasant Street
- Installation of an exhaust hood for Eliana’s Mediterranean Restaurant

X. PLANNING BOARD COMMITTEE & LIAISON REPORTS

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission – Bruce Carson
Community Preservation Act Committee – Pari Riahi
Agricultural Commission – Stephen Schreiber
Transportation Task Force – Rob Crownier – Ms. Brestrup reported that there would be a meeting of the TTF on September 21st.
Design Review Board – vacant
Housing and Sheltering Committee – Greg Stutsman
Zoning Subcommittee – Rob Crownier, Bruce Carson, Greg Stutsman and Stephen Schreiber

XI. REPORT OF THE CHAIR – Mr. Webber reported that the opening of the Atkins North Market was a success. The store looks great and people were excited to be there.

He also welcomed the Planning Board’s newest member, Christine Gray-Mullen, who is currently serving as the Chair of Public Works Committee.

XII. REPORT OF STAFF – none

XIII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:14 PM.

Respectfully submitted: Approved:

Christine M. Brestrup
Senior Planner

David Webber, Chair

DATE: _____