

## AMHERST PLANNING BOARD

Wednesday, May 3rd, 2017, 7:00 PM

Town Room, Town Hall

### MINUTES

**PRESENT:** Greg Stutsman, Acting Chair, Robert Crouner, Michael Birtwistle, Jack Jemsek, Maria Chao, Pari Riahi, Richard Roznoy

**ABSENT:** Stephen Schreiber, Chair, Christine Gray-Mullen

**STAFF:** Christine Brestrup, Planning Director  
Steven McCarthy, Administrative Assistant

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Mr. Stutsman opened the meeting at 7:00 PM.

#### I. MINUTES

The minutes of March 15, 2017 were reviewed.

Mr. Birtwistle MOVED to approve the minutes as submitted. Mr. Roznoy seconded. The vote was 4-0-3 (Riahi, Stutsman, Jemsek abstaining.) The motion passed.

#### II. PLANNING & ZONING

##### A. Planning for Amherst Town Center

The Chair thanked Ms. Chao for her plan. Ms. Brestrup said that the Town Manager had suggested a small steering committee, consisting of two Planning Board members, two Select Board members, one neighborhood resident, and one representative from the business community. Staff members would likely be Ms. Brestrup, in her role as Planning Director, the Town Manager, and Mr. Kravitz, the Economic Development Director. The meetings may or may not be posted, but will likely be open. Mr. Crouner and Mr. Stutsman will be the Planning Board representatives to the steering committee. Ms. Chao will serve as an advisor for the process.

Ms. Brestrup said the Town Manager wants to get a handle on what kinds of information is desired out of this process - a sense about what kind of building height is expected downtown, and a sense of the desired bulk, mass, and usage of buildings. Does the downtown need more office space, housing, retail? An objective is to try to attract young professionals and people who would have relatively high paying jobs in town and could then help boost the economy. The issue of a need for office space downtown is confusing because it has been said that there is a lot of vacant office space, but Mr. Kravitz has discovered many people are looking for 5-6,000 square feet of office space and can't find it in one space. A goal is to consider the transition areas all around downtown, not just the B-L.

##### B. Public Comment Period

Sarah la Cour, the Executive Director of the BID, asked if along with the town center planning piece there will be a specific problem statement to ascertain what exactly the question is that is being asked with this process is. She said her understanding was that part of this process came from the ongoing discussion of the B-L and transition zones, but the objective as discussed today seems very broad. Perhaps at some point the target of these forums could be addressed. She said she was concerned the forums won't be addressing what she understands to be the problem, the B-L and transition zones.

Ms. Brestrup said that from her conversations with the Town Manager, the question for these forums is broader than the B-L and transition zones. She said that he understands that that is the root of the discussion in the first place, but it is too limiting to just talk about zoning and the districts that abut downtown. He wanted to open the question up to a broader audience with

a broader sense of things to talk about. The Town Manager was asked to participate and lead this process - if we want him to be involved, we have to recognize his point of view as well as how the process originated.

Mr. Stutsman said that that question is largely up to the steering committee, but the comment will be brought forward.

Ms. Chao said that the second question dives into details, and the last two are ways to do this.

Mr. Birtwistle said that he wants to prioritize the importance and depth of the first question. The forums need to address where the downtown is, how big it is, what it should be like - zoning is the way to address those things. It is important that the downtown isn't defined just by people who work and live downtown, but by the whole community.

Ms. Brestrup said she thought the Town Manager would appreciate input from Ms. la Cour on a potential person to join the Steering Committee representing the business community.

Mr. Jemsek said he was interested to hear Ms. la Cour's input on what businesses she would like to come into downtown Amherst.

Ms. la Cour said she has been grappling with that question. The BID had Isenberg students conduct a marketing study on what undergrads would like to see downtown; trends are more experiential and activities, and less traditional retail. There is also interest in shops and retail for a variety of demographics - a department store-like place with display models that can order things online for you. There was also interest in variety stores in the five-and-dime model, selling clothes, shoes - things people still want to try on. The BID is working on that exact question. Retail is looking at smaller square footage stores.

### III. OLD BUSINESS

#### A. Tofino Associates LLC – Amherst Hills Subdivision – Three Party Agreement

Mr. Stutsman recused himself.

Ms. Brestrup said that the Planning Department has received the estimate from the Town Engineer on the cost of completing the road – roughly \$288,000. This does not include the Linden Ridge Road cul-de-sac. The Town has received a letter from Greenfield Savings Bank saying they will enter the agreement, although it has not been reviewed for a final time by Town Counsel. The Planning Board may have a discussion about this in concept, or talk about this again on May 17<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Birtwistle asked if there was pressure from the developer to get the agreement signed by the next meeting.

Ms. Brestrup said that there was pressure to get it done on February 1<sup>st</sup>; if it needs to be, the agreement can be signed on May 17<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Crowner said that he thought the next meeting was planned for the 31<sup>st</sup>, not the 17<sup>th</sup>.

Ms. Brestrup said that was correct, and if the Board would like to agree to this, the chair must sign it. The Board could say that they are interested in entering the agreement, and authorize Mr. Schreiber to sign the agreement if Town Counsel says everything looks fine.

Mr. Crowner asked if this had come before the Board a year or two ago, and why it did not go through at that time.

Ms. Brestrup said that that had been the same agreement. At the time, the Board did not hear from the Town Engineer, but got the legal word that there were a couple things missing from the agreement. There have been minor changes since then, but Ms. Brestrup did not anticipate there would be any problems. The Board could say the agreement looks good from their end, and condition upon Town Counsel approval the chair could sign it.

Mr. Crowner said he has looked at this many times, and it seems ready to go.

Mr. Roznoy asked if the estimate would be plugged in on page 3. Ms. Brestrup said it would, and it also needs a date.

Mr. Roznoy MOVED to enter the agreement contingent on Town Counsel approval. Mr. Crowner seconded, but suggested there should be a time limit. Mr. Roznoy agreed. Mr. Crowner proposed an expiration date of November. Mr. Roznoy suggested 45 days, for a date of July 1<sup>st</sup>. The vote was 6-0-1 (Stutsman abstaining). The motion passed.

**B. Signing of Decisions**

SPR2017-00010 & SPP2017-00003 – Archipelago Investments LLC –  
26 Spring Street

Was unable to be completed by meeting time.

SPR2017-00011 & SPP2017-00004 – Atkins Farms & W.D. Cows on behalf of tenant Atkins  
Farms – 113 Cows Road/134 Montague Road

SPR2017-00012 – Amherst Works – 11 Amity Street

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

**IV. NEW BUSINESS**

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

**V. TOWN MEETING**

**A. Preparation for Town Meeting**

The Planning Board members will not be required to go to Town Meeting this week. Mr. Roznoy said that Ms. Riahi's LHD testimony was well received, and the warrant article was overwhelmingly approved.

**B. Recap of Town Meeting actions**

Mr. Crowner said he had heard some feedback from a Town Meeting member about the side yard setback article. Mr. Stutsman said that it did not come up at any precinct meetings he had attended. While corrective language could be approved in the future, we chose not to change any language at all for this article. Mr. Crowner agreed that was the right approach.

**VI. FORM A (ANR) SUBDIVISION APPLICATIONS**

ANR 2017-00010 – This ANR concerns the adjustment of property lines for two parcels off of Montague Road. The Planning Board endorsed this ANR.

ANR 2017-00011 – This ANR concerns the adjustment of property lines for two parcels on Aubinwood Road, which was a planned development in the 1960s. These lots are no longer buildable as originally laid out due to changes in the zoning bylaws, so this ANR allows one of the lots, which is vacant, to be built upon. The Planning Board endorsed this ANR.

**VII. UPCOMING ZBA APPLICATIONS – none.**

**VIII. UPCOMING SPP/SPR/SUB APPLICATIONS – none.**

**IX. PLANNING BOARD COMMITTEE & LIAISON REPORTS**

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission – Jack Jemsek and Christine Gray-Mullen – Planning Board representatives went to the April 20th meeting of the PVPC, and found it very interesting. Discussion

focused on the CPA and the support thereof, and CDBG funds. Amherst is lucky to do well with CPA, and Planning Board representatives were surprised to hear other towns don't participate. All towns pay into CPA via fees, but only those who apply and put in the work get funds. The CDBG discussion was interesting because some people didn't think the government should pay for those things. The PVPC ultimately made the decision to support them, but support was limited.

Ms. Riahi noted that Town Meeting Article 12 passed, so all CPAC funds will go forward.

Community Preservation Act Committee – Pari Riahi – No update.

Agricultural Commission – Stephen Schreiber – No update.

Design Review Board – Michael Birtwistle – No update.

Housing and Sheltering Committee – Greg Stutsman – No update.

Zoning Subcommittee – Rob Crowner, Greg Stutsman and Maria Chao

UTAC (University and Town of Amherst Collaborative) – Greg Stutsman and Christine Gray-Mullen

Downtown Parking Working Group – Christine Gray-Mullen and Richard Roznoy

Transportation Advisory Committee – Richard Roznoy – TAC has heard several presentations from MassDOT recently. One presentation involved a section of Route 9 from University Drive to Pleasant Street - 5 options for reconfiguration were shown, and comments were received. The other presentation concerned Route 9 further to the west up to the I-91 interchange, but Planning Board representatives were unable to attend.

Ms. Brestrup expanded on the proposal for Route 9 from University Drive to Pleasant Street – MassDOT's preferred proposal is for a multiuse path on the north side of the road and a sidewalk on the south side. Many commenters agreed that a multiuse path would be dangerous on that road, as bikes going downhill rapidly could strike pedestrians on the path. The DPW's comments will likely include that concern. They are going to propose that there be bike lanes in the street, and that the multiuse path travel on north side until the gate at Amherst College's stadium, crossing there, and then following down the south side of the road to University Drive where it can connect to the Arthur Smith trail. Ms. Brestrup said she thinks the idea has merit, and Mr. Mooring and his staff will prepare a letter and plan. MassDOT said they would only accept comments for ten days, but will accept comments from the town after that.

Mr. Roznoy noted that the Route 9 issue is an agenda item for the TAC meeting next Tuesday.

Ms. Brestrup noted that the other MassDOT item of concern is the B-43 bus that connects Northampton with the center of Amherst. Currently, it comes up Route 9, makes some stops at UMass, stops in the center of town, and then reverses course and heads down Route 9 to Northampton. MassDOT wants rapid transit between the two towns, and proposes to truncate the route of the B-43 bus route to instead go from Northampton to the Haigis Mall via Routes 9 and 116, then reversing course to Northampton. Town staff feels this is problematic, as it leaves out downtown Amherst, and downtown merchants and Amherst College students may suffer. MassDOT says there are other buses connecting the university and downtown Amherst. We propose to ask MassDOT to come here and give a presentation, inviting the BID, the Chamber, TAC, Amherst College, UMass, etc. These decisions are being made in Northampton, not thinking what it means for Amherst.

**X. REPORT OF THE CHAIR** – none.

**XI. REPORT OF STAFF** – none.

**XII. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 5:56 PM.

Respectfully submitted:

Approved:

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Steven McCarthy  
Administrative Assistant

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Stephen Schreiber, Chair

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_