

AMHERST PLANNING BOARD
Wednesday, August 16, 2017, 7:00 PM
Town Room, Town Hall
MINUTES

PRESENT: Stephen Schreiber, Chair, Robert Crowner, Michael Birtwistle, Greg Stutsman, Christine Gray-Mullen
ABSENT: Maria Chao, Pari Riahi, Richard Roznoy, Jack Jemsek
STAFF: Christine Brestrup, Planning Director

Mr. Schreiber opened the meeting at 7:01 PM.

I. MINUTES

Mr. Stutsman MOVED to approve the Minutes of May 31, 2017. Ms. Gray-Mullen seconded and the vote was 5-0-0.

Mr. Stutsman MOVED to approve the Minutes of June 21, 2017. Ms. Gray-Mullen seconded and the vote was 4-0-1 (Schreiber abstained).

It was not yet time for the first public hearing so the Board turned to other business.

VI. FORM A (ANR) SUBDIVISION APPLICATIONS

The Board endorsed the following application:

ANR2018-05 – John & Elizabeth Gummere – 415 Shays Street

II. PUBLIC HEARINGS – SITE PLAN REVIEW

SPR2018-02 – Amherst College – Softball Field – 212 Northampton Road

Request Site Plan Review approval for improvements to the existing softball field, including new dugouts, bullpens, and batting tunnels, new backstop system and modification of the alignment of a small section of existing fencing (Map 14C-13, R-N zoning district)

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

Robb Champlin from Clark Companies presented the application. The project will provide improvements for players. There will be covered dugouts – 10' x 46' brick structures with roofs that will be at grade and accessible. Two double bullpens will be constructed with synthetic turf, which will be helpful since the players start their season in February. A double batting column with a synthetic turf surface will be added with overhead nets. A brick backstop wall with padding will be installed extending from dugout to dugout. There will be a suspended net system that will allow spectators to see through it. A proposed modification to the plan would move the bullpen from centerfield, as shown on the plan, to a position behind third base.

Mr. Schreiber gave the report on the site visit, attended by himself, Ms. Gray-Mullen, Ms. Brestrup and Tom Davies from Amherst College. There were no concerns brought up at the site visit.

Mr. Stutsman MOVED to close the public hearing and to find that the application meets the relevant criteria of Section 11.24 of the Zoning Bylaw, to grant the Site Plan Review approval including the modification to the plan showing a relocated bullpen, granting the requested waivers and with no conditions. Ms. Gray-Mullen seconded and the vote was 5-0-0.

It was not yet time for the next public hearing so the Board turned to other business.

VI. FORM A (ANR) SUBDIVISION APPLICATIONS – none

VII. UPCOMING ZBA APPLICATIONS – none

VIII. UPCOMING SPP/SPR/SUB APPLICATIONS – none

X. REPORT OF THE CHAIR – none

XI. REPORT OF STAFF – Ms. Brestrup reported that Jonathan Tucker will be retiring after working for the town for 32 years. There will be a celebration of his tenure with the town on Friday, September 22, at Johnny’s Tavern and Planning Board members are invited to attend.

IV. OLD BUSINESS

- A.** Signing of Decisions – The Board signed the following decision:
SPR2017-00013 – Craig’s Doors, A Home Association – 434 North Pleasant Street
- B.** Planning Board Summer/Fall Schedule – update – The Board discussed the summer/fall schedule. The date of September 20th was originally scheduled for a Planning Board meeting, but it coincides with a religious holiday, so the meeting has been cancelled. The Board agreed to meet on September 13th instead. To accommodate public hearings for zoning amendments the Board also agreed to meet on September 19th. The Board also agreed to meet on September 12th on Flood Plain Mapping, for a presentation by Jeff Burm of AECOM, of the revised flood plain maps.
- C.** Topics not reasonably anticipated 48 hours prior to the meeting – none

The Board returned to public hearings.

III. PUBLIC HEARINGS – SITE PLAN REVIEW

SPR2018-03 – Town of Amherst Facilities Department – Amherst Regional High School – 21 Mattoon Street

Request Site Plan Review approval for installation of two 12’ x 20’ storage structures with pressure treated ramps (Map 11D-215, R-G zoning district)

Rob Morra, Building Commissioner, presented this application on behalf of the Town of Amherst. The proposal is to install two sheds in place of a 40 foot long metal storage trailer which has been removed. The sheds will be eight feet high. They will be used to store athletic equipment. The sheds will be 12’ x 20’, and will be in the style of garages. They will be easily accessible, water-tight and will have more space than the trailer. There will be a 12” pad constructed of crushed stone and pressure-treated ramps to access the doors to the sheds.

Mr. Schreiber gave the report on the site visit. Questions had been asked about lighting.

Mr. Morra reported that there would be no lighting, either interior or exterior, at this time. People who use the sheds would rely on lighting from the nearby parking lot. There is currently no power to the location. Each shed will have an opening similar to an overhead garage door.

Mr. Morra reported that once the sheds are delivered the coaches and Athletic Director will improve the interior. They may choose to have interior lighting at that time.

The sheds will be locked when not in use and the Athletic Director will be given the keys.

Mr. Stutsman MOVED to close the public hearing and to find that the application meets the relevant criteria of Section 11.24 of the Zoning Bylaw, to grant the Site Plan Review approval including the requested waivers and with no conditions. Ms. Gray-Mullen seconded and the vote was 5-0-0.

It was not yet time for the next public hearing so the Board turned to other business.

IX. PLANNING BOARD COMMITTEE & LIAISON REPORTS

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission – Jack Jemsek and Christine Gray-Mullen – no report

Community Preservation Act Committee – Pari Riahi – no report

Agricultural Commission – Stephen Schreiber reported that the Agricultural Commission had not met.

Design Review Board – Michael Birtwistle – no report

Amherst Municipal Affordable Housing Trust – Greg Stutsman reported that the AMAHT had adopted its strategic plan. The Board will schedule a meeting with the Trust, tentatively set for September 6th.

Zoning Subcommittee – Rob Crowner, Greg Stutsman and Maria Chao – report presented later

UTAC (University and Town of Amherst Collaborative) – Greg Stutsman and Christine Gray-Mullen – no report

Downtown Parking Working Group – Richard Roznoy – Ms. Brestrup reported that the DPWG would be meeting with the Select Board on August 30th to offer its recommendations.

Transportation Advisory Committee – Richard Roznoy – no report

It was not yet time for the next public hearing so the Board turned to other business.

IV. PLANNING & ZONING

A. ZSC Report – Mr. Crowner reported that the ZSC was proposing to hold public hearings on zoning amendments on September 13th – on the Table 3 footnotes and on commercial parking facilities. The other articles being proposed have to do with recreational marijuana. The ZSC is proposing a new use category for recreational marijuana establishments and is proceeding with language that would separate out all marijuana use categories and add a definition for recreational marijuana establishments. September 19th was proposed for a public hearing on that topic. In addition, the ZSC is considering a Temporary Moratorium on recreational marijuana establishments until the end of 2018. The ZSC proposes putting the moratorium on the Town Meeting Warrant in case the zoning amendment on the new use category fails. The ZSC is also continuing to work on a zoning amendment regarding Class II apartments, but it won't be ready for fall.

The Board agreed with the schedule for public hearings as outlined by Mr. Crowner.

B. Downtown/Town Center Community Forum – planning for fall forum – none

C. Public Comment – none

D. Other

The Board returned to public hearings.

V. PUBLIC HEARINGS – SITE PLAN REVIEW

SPR2018-04 – Town of Amherst Facilities Department – property behind North Amherst Library – 8 & 24 Montague Road

Request Site Plan Review approval to change configuration of town-owned parking lot, to stripe parking lot, to install signage and install a seasonal outdoor portable toilet (Map 5A-37 & 38, B-VC zoning district)

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

Rob Morra, Building Commissioner, presented the application on behalf of the town. The plan was prepared by the Town Engineer. The town has recently purchased the property behind the North Amherst Library and this application is a proposal to formalize the parking there.

The proposal includes installation of barriers on the Montague Road side of the parking lot to prevent through traffic. There are 28 parking spaces planned, including 2 handicapped parking spaces. One-way traffic is proposed and the width of the travel lane is proposed to be 20 feet. The pavement will be cleaned and striped. A level space will be created for a portable toilet with a connection to the sidewalk along Sunderland Road. The portable toilet is located in a spot that is the shortest route from the door of the Library (about 125 feet). Lines will be painted and handicapped parking signs will be installed.

Mr. Schreiber and Ms. Gray-Mullen reported on the site visit. The parking lot is now an empty lot, with a portable toilet in the southwest corner. The toilet is locked and Jersey barriers have been installed along the eastern edge of the parking area.

Mr. Birtwistle asked about traffic flow from Sunderland Road and whether the curb cut there is continuous. He asked how traffic from Sunderland Road would be controlled. Mr. Morra stated that traffic would be controlled by arrows painted on the pavement. Ms. Brestrup noted that there had been questions at the site visit about lighting around the portable toilet and whether it would be locked at night. The final location of the portable toilet will be closer to Sunderland Road in the corner of the parking lot, and will have some light from an existing streetlight on Sunderland Road. The issue of locking the portable toilet is being explored. The toilet will be maintained by the people who rent it to the town. They would rather not have it locked so that they can easily clean it when they are in the area. The toilet will be seasonal.

Terry Johnson, a resident of North Amherst, stated that she had donated the money to install the portable toilet. She presented a letter to the Board. She thanked the town for its willingness to accept the temporary solution and expressed her hopes that there would be a permanent solution to the issue of a public toilet for the North Amherst Library.

Vince O'Connor of Summer Street stated that residents of North Amherst had submitted a letter regarding the proposed plan. Board members paused to read the letter. He noted that the single row of parking immediately behind the Library is adequate and has not ever been full. There are more important things than the number of parking spaces to consider. There is a need for Library patrons to be able to access the front door of the Library from the parking lot. People with mobility impairments and people with children need a sidewalk from where the cars now park to the Library entrance. He recommended moving the parking spaces further north and providing a sidewalk along the edge of what is now the parking lot, from east to west, so that people could walk in front of the parked cars rather than behind them. He recommended locating one handicapped parking space at each end of the first row of parking, and requested that the driveway entrance from Montague Road be opened up again, so that people could enter the parking lot from both sides. He noted that whatever we do now is likely to remain for a while and a sidewalk would encourage people to use the Library.

Mr. O'Connor also noted that the crosswalk across Montague Road was eliminated as a result of the repaving. We need a crosswalk from the shopping area to the Library.

There was discussion about the fact that Montague Road is a state highway, under the jurisdiction of Mass DOT and that any improvements on Montague Road need permission from the state. Mr. O'Connor asked for improvements to the Montague Road sidewalk from the parking lot to the front of the Library.

Mr. O'Connor also urged that the Planning Board not act until it hears recommendations from the Design Review Board, which will be meeting "next Tuesday" [August 22nd].

Mr. Crowner asked about the number of unofficial parking spaces in the lot at this time. There was an estimate of about 10 to 11 spaces.

There was further discussion about the number of spaces currently available in the parking lot and the difficulty of navigating the intersection of Montague Road and Sunderland Road, without the ability to use the parking lot as a pass-through. Mr. O'Connor described the difficulty of exiting the parking lot onto Sunderland Road and turning left and then left again at the intersection with Montague Road, if one wanted to travel north along Montague Road from the Library.

Board members questioned why the barriers were installed and whether the parking lot circulation needed to be one-way and whether the access aisle(s) could be wider. Ms. Brestrup stated that the parking lot was envisioned to serve both the Library and the "Cow Field". In order to have enough parking for both uses, the drive aisles needed to be narrow, to accommodate more parking spaces. The narrow aisles are too narrow to accommodate two-way traffic. In order to have traffic flowing in from both Montague Road and Sunderland Road the drive aisles would need to be two way. Therefore the barriers were proposed to prevent entry and exit from Montague Road.

Mr. O'Connor recommended that the additional parking be moved back 4 feet from the edge of the paved area to provide a walkway for pedestrians. He noted that with impending construction along Cows Road, more people would need to seek alternative routes and would need to pass through the parking lot from Montague Road to Sunderland Road.

Mr. Birtwistle attempted to sum up the discussion. The number of parking spaces proposed may not be needed for the Library. He suggested eliminating half of the center island of parking and reducing the number of spaces to 18 and allowing wider drive aisles. Improvements to the "Cow Field" across Sunderland Road may mean that users of the field will want to park behind the Library. The parking spaces will serve both the Library and the "Cow Field". The portable toilet will also serve users of both facilities. Therefore the toilet should be left unlocked to serve both groups of users. The issue of access from Montague Road is also relevant but the solution is complicated.

Mr. Morra stated that in the Town Engineer's layout the aisle widths dictate one-way traffic. The parking closest to the Library is the most important. The budget for this project is small and it is not possible to make this into a larger project. The Town Engineer believes that opening up the access from Montague Road would not provide a safe solution. Mr. Morra stated that this was probably a three-year solution and the Board could consider this to be a three-year permit. Longer term it will need more attention. We are fortunate to have the toilet for one year, but we don't know what will happen in future years. At this time there is no thought about locking the toilet.

Pat Holland, of Montague Road, stated that she wrote the book about the history of the North Amherst Library and offered a number of points: the Jersey barriers are ugly, people need a way to access Montague Road, maybe speed bumps could be used to discourage cut-through traffic, and it is a nuisance to drive around. The beautiful Library has been disgraced by the Jersey barriers.

Mr. O'Connor offered testimony about the informal parking behind the Library, the parking on Sunderland Road next to the travel lane, access from the breakdown lane along Montague Road (to be discouraged), possible use of Jersey barriers as internal dividers within the parking lot instead of blocking access from Montague Road, the need for parking that is friendly to users of the Library, asserted that the new sidewalk won't be expensive, and parking needs to be safe.

Ms. Gray-Mullen agreed with Points #4 [providing a crosswalk] and #5 [repairing a section of sidewalk along Montague Road] of the letter submitted by the residents, noting that there does need to be a sidewalk across Montague Road from the shopping center to the Library.

Mr. Morra reported that Guilford Mooring, Superintendent of Public Works, has reached out to the state on the issue of a crosswalk and curb cuts across Montague Road.

Mr. Crowner was convinced that a sidewalk is needed between Montague Road and Sunderland Road. He recommended including it in the town's capital plan for next year. He was reluctant to approve a plan that included Jersey barriers that do not have a termination date.

The Board discussed imposing a condition that would require a review in three years.

There was discussion about whether there is room between the existing parking lot and the Library building for a sidewalk. There are two trees in this location, making the construction of a sidewalk south of the edge of the parking lot problematic. If the parking lot were moved north, a sidewalk might be constructed and the trees might be saved.

The Board discussed the option of using angled parking and lessening the width of the drive aisles and also discussed the option of widening the width of the drive aisles and creating fewer spaces.

Other options for providing parking were discussed. Mr. Birtwistle asked that the DPW prepare a new plan.

Mr. Morra explained that the DPW will be working on the old gas station building and will need access to it for equipment storage and so the parking cannot be placed up against the building. The building can only be accessed from the south side because there is a fence around the other sides enclosing a yard where Ernie's Towing stores the cars that they have towed. Ernie's Towing will continue to use this area for a while in an agreement with the town.

Mr. Stutsman proposed approving the location of the handicapped parking spots and the location of the porta-potty. There was further discussion about the location of the handicapped parking spaces.

Ms. Gray-Mullen noted that pedestrian access from the parking lot along the Sunderland Road sidewalk is superior to the access along Montague Road. She noted that if the parking lot is closed off from Montague Road, it will be fairly safe for pedestrians to walk in the parking lot. She recommended that the issues about the sidewalks and crosswalks for Montague Road be referred to the Transportation Advisory Committee.

Ms. Gray-Mullen reported that the lacrosse teams and cricket teams use the Cow Field and would be pleased to have the parking behind the Library. She agreed that some parking spaces could be eliminated at each end of the central area.

Mr. Stutsman proposed requiring review of the Jersey barriers in 9 months.

Mr. Birtwistle MOVED to close the public hearing, to approve the siting of the portable toilet and the striping of the southern section of the parking lot closest to the Library, but not including the central area at this time, until a plan for restriping has been approved, with waivers and conditions as discussed. Ms. Gray-Mullen seconded.

The Board discussed possible conditions, including requiring that a plan for restriping and for removal of the Jersey barriers come back to the Board. Mr. O'Connor urged the Board to wait until the DRB had made its recommendations before voting. The Board noted that the DRB's recommendations are advisory. The Board discussed taking no action tonight and asking the Town Engineer to come back with a plan for striping and to hear from the Design Review Board.

The Board decided to approve the plan with a condition that it be brought back to the Board for review in 9 months to decide the fate of the Jersey barriers.

The vote was 5-0-0.

Waivers

- Landscape Plan
- Lighting Plan
- Erosion Control Plan
- Management Plan

- Traffic Impact Statement

Conditions

1. The applicant shall return to the Board with a revised plan for restriping of the rest of the parking lot, for review and approval by the Board at a public meeting.
2. The applicant shall return to the Board in 9 months from the date of this public hearing with a plan for removing or replacing the Jersey barriers and to determine what the new traffic flow will be throughout the parking area.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:42 PM.

Respectfully submitted:

Approved:

Christine Brestrup
Planning Director

Stephen Schreiber, Chair

DATE: _____