

**AMHERST PLANNING BOARD**  
**Wednesday, November 15, 2017, 7:00 PM**  
**Town Room, Town Hall**  
**MINUTES**

**PRESENT:** Stephen Schreiber, Chair, Maria Chao, Robert Crowner, Michael Birtwistle, Jack Jemsek, Christine Gray-Mullen and Greg Stutsman

**ABSENT:** Pari Riahi

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

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Mr. Schreiber opened the meeting at 7:05 PM.

**I. MINUTES** – There were no Minutes available for review.

**II. PUBLIC HEARINGS – SITE PLAN REVIEW**

**SPR2018-07 – Institute for Training and Development – 8 Sunset Avenue**

Request Site Plan Review approval for construction of a new ramp at the main entrance to the house (Map 14A/10, R-G zoning district)

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

Jody Barker, the architect for ITD, presented the application. The proposal is to add a ramp to the residential house at the front entrance, leading from the front walkway up to the porch. The porch is 27” off the grade of the surrounding ground. There is a 6” step into the front door. Mr. Barker showed a plan of the existing conditions on the site. There are large trees on the site, including a Japanese Katsura tree near the area where the ramp is proposed to be installed.

The plan includes a ramp going up to the porch on the right side of the entry as one looks at the front of the building. There is a proposed sidewalk from the existing concrete walk to the beginning of the ramp. A platform will be created on top of the porch deck to provide a top landing area for the ramp that is level with the finished floor of the first floor of the building. A drop-off area for the van is proposed to be created in the driveway and will be connected to the main existing walkway via a new walkway built of concrete pavers. The ramp is proposed to be wood to match the existing deck of the porch. New railings will also be wood, painted to match the trim of the building. There will be metal handrails internal to the ramp. The bottom of the ramp will be wrapped with lattice.

Mr. Barker noted that the plan shows a portion of the drop-off area in the town right of way. The drop-off area can be moved farther into the site to get it out of the right of way. The initial location was an effort to avoid the roots of the large Katsura tree.

Mr. Birtwistle asked about installing an edge around the platform at the top of the ramp to prevent people in wheelchairs from rolling off the edge. There was discussion about this issue and the Board members decided that the Building Commissioner should make the determination about whether an edge is needed or not.

Mr. Crowner asked if the drop-off area needed to be a pull-off at the edge of the driveway or whether it could just be an area along the driveway where a van can stop and drop someone off.

The driveway is a gravel driveway, but ITD is considering paving it. The drop-off is also proposed to be gravel.

There was further discussion about the location of the drop-off area.

Ms. Brestrup offered to work out these details (edge treatment at the top of the ramp and drop-off location) with the Building Commissioner.

Mr. Stutsman MOVED to close the public hearing, to grant approval of the application, subject to the Building Commissioner's review and approval of the conditions at the top landing of the ramp and the drop-off area along the driveway, and to grant the requested waivers and to find that the application meets the relevant criteria of Section 11.24 of the Zoning Bylaw. Ms. Gray-Mullen seconded and the vote was 7-0-0.

**SPR2018-08 – Larry Rideout, Construction Manager for University of Massachusetts Foundation, Inc. – 412-418 North Pleasant Street (Crotty Hall)**

Request Site Plan Review approval for installation of 6-foot high black chain link fence along southern property line (Map 11A/30, R-G zoning district)

Mr. Schreiber read the preamble and opened the public hearing. He then recused himself because he works for the University and works with the architect who designed the building. Mr. Stutsman chaired the public hearing.

Larry Rideout, Construction Manager for the University of Massachusetts Foundation, presented the application. The Foundation would like to install a 6 foot high chain link fence along the southern property line to prevent foot traffic from going across the site to access Phillips Street. Blowing trash is also an issue and the fence will prevent trash from blowing onto the Foundation's property.

Three Board members had attended the site visit. Mr. Crowner reported that there was ample bike parking on-site. There is a stairway to the First Baptist Church parking lot which provides an obvious pathway for cutting through the Foundation's property.

Jim Turner, at abutter on Phillips Street, also a Town Meeting member and an ARA member, expressed concern about the fence cutting off a portion of his property. He has an ongoing dispute with the Foundation about where his property line is located. He showed an aerial photo of the site, showing where a buffer of trees had been removed along the property line, in order to build Crotty Hall. Mr. Turner did not object to the fence itself, but only to its potential for cutting off a piece of land that he views to be his property. He would prefer a 4 foot high fence with a hedge. He would also like the fence to "jog around the tree" and "keep the fence at a higher level on the property". He mentioned the setback requirement for buildings in this zoning district. He asserted that he had not been in communication with the owner and the builder.

Mr. Rideout stated that there are plants in the buffer strip between the building and the southern property line. There will also be ivy planted on the fence, to provide a "green fence". The fence itself will be black vinyl-coated. Mr. Rideout stated that he does not plan to cut more trees to install the fence and will work around the tree mentioned by Mr. Turner.

Ms. Brestrup stated that Mr. Turner had brought up his concerns about the property line in the public hearing for the Site Plan Review for the building. She explained that the property line dispute is something that cannot be settled by the Planning Board, but is a dispute between property owners that is typically settled in court. Mr. Rideout noted that the property has been surveyed twice by two different surveyors and that the property line as shown on the Site Plan is correct according to those surveys.

Mr. Turner was agreeable to having the fence go around the tree.

Mr. Stutsman suggested a condition that the applicant make a good faith effort to protect any trees in the vicinity.

Mr. Rideout pointed out that the trees are in the wetland and therefore he cannot cut them.

Mr. Crowner noted that the location of the fence can be deviated slightly in the southwest corner.

Mr. Jemsek asked why the fence didn't have a "right angle" at the corner of the property. It was explained that the fence doesn't go to the corner of the property.

There was discussion about the wetland and the fact that there was debris in the wetland.

Mr. Crowner MOVED to close the public hearing, to approve the Site Plan as proposed, including an allowance for a slight deviation in the alignment of the fence, to approve the waivers as requested and to find that the application meets the relevant criteria of Section 11.24 of the Zoning Bylaw. Ms. Gray-Mullen seconded and the vote was 6-0-0 (Schreiber recused).

Mr. Schreiber rejoined the Board.

**III. PRESENTATION AND REVIEW – Open Space and Recreation Plan – Nate Malloy, Senior Planner, and Beth Willson, Wetlands Administrator – 2017 Update – Presentation and Request for Letter of Support**

Mr. Malloy and Ms. Willson presented the updated Open Space and Recreation Plan. They acknowledged the help that they received from former Planning Department staff member, Jonathan Tucker, who has since retired. They asked for the Planning Board's support. The OSRP was originally done in 2009. The draft of the update was reviewed by the Planning Board several months ago. After that review the town submitted the OSRP to the state and received comments. There is a certain format that is prescribed by the state. In addition to comments from the state, the town received 150 comments from an online survey. The draft has been updated in response to the comments. The biggest change has to do with the philosophy and goals, making them consistent. There is a good description of the town and the action plan, and the objectives are thorough. Sections 6 through 9 were the ones that received the most updating (Section 6, Community Vision, Section 7, Analysis of Needs, Section 8, Goals and Objectives, and Section 9, Seven Year Action Plan.) Mr. Malloy summarized the action items and emphasized the need for stewardship and appropriating money for maintenance.

Ms. Willson summarized the findings in Section 7, Analysis of Needs. The town needs new recreation facilities in and near the village centers, conservation and recreation areas need to be made more accessible, there needs to be more connectivity between areas, large blocks of open space should continue to be preserved, wildlife corridors should be preserved. The OSRP lists who is responsible for action items and where funding may come from.

The state looks at the OSRP when the town applies for grant funds.

Ms. Willson noted that the Conservation Commission had recently reviewed the OSRP and that they appreciated the emphasis on stewardship. The town has approximately 2,000 acres of conservation land.

Mr. Crowner asked whether the town receives feedback when it applies for park grants and land grants.

Mr. Malloy stated that the town used the OSRP as a reference for the Groff Park grant application. The application referred to statements in the OSRP.

Mr. Jemsek asked how school properties were viewed in the OSRP.

The school properties are identified as usable acreage. But there needs to be better coordination between the schools and the town and we need more areas for recreation.

Ms. Gray-Mullen noted that a better system of lighting is needed at the ARHS football field and soccer field.

Mr. Malloy reported that this is a level of detail that the OSRP did not deal with. There is now a working group working on an athletic facilities master plan for the area around Community Field and the High School.

Mr. Birtwistle commented that the report was excellent. The goals were well-articulated. It works well with the Master Plan. He had questions about implementation. He was surprised by the statistics on the absence of usable playing fields. He questioned whether they could reasonably be located in village centers since they need to be flat, treeless and large spaces. We need more than a few. He questioned whether the goal was realistic, especially for areas near village centers.

Mr. Stutsman asked whether there was a metric regarding upkeep for conservation areas. How difficult is it to keep up our conservation areas?

Ms. Willson and Mr. Malloy stated that trail maintenance is an issue. We have over 80 miles of trails. The plan identifies recreation priority areas and the town intends to work with partners on upkeep.

The town also looks at properties for multiple uses – conservation, recreation and housing. Hawthorne Farm on East Pleasant Street was cited as an example.

Ms. Chao commented that the town should focus on maintenance of existing fields rather than creating a lot of new ones.

Mr. Malloy noted that the town is working with a consultant to develop a 5-year capital maintenance budget.

Mr. Jemsek was glad to see that a dog park was mentioned in the plan.

Mr. Stutsman asked if the town was drawing back from acquisition. Not necessarily. The town uses grants and CPA funds for acquisition.

Ms. Brestrup presented the Planning Board with a draft letter of support, based on the letter the Board had sent in 2009.

Mr. Jemsek asked if the town could convert conservation land to other purposes, rather than acquiring more land. Mr. Malloy stated that conservation land is permanently protected. Some conservation land can be used for farming and some passive recreational purposes.

The Board reviewed the draft letter of support.

Mr. Crowner MOVED to authorize the Chair to sign the letter of support. Mr. Stutsman seconded and the vote was 7-0-0.

Mr. Schreiber signed the letter.

#### **IV. PLANNING & ZONING**

- A.** ZSC Report – The ZSC report was presented later in the meeting.
- B.** Downtown/Town Center Community Forum – planning for fall forum December 6 – Pole Room, Bangs Center – Ms. Brestrup explained the current thoughts about the content of Forum #2, including presenting photographs of cities and towns and streetscapes and asking attendees to give their preferences. Mr. Birtwistle suggested that we include images of Downtown Amherst along with other cities and towns.
- C.** Public Comment – none
- D.** Other

**V. TOWN MEETING**

- A.** Debrief – Ms. Brestrup reported on the two zoning amendments that passed Town Meeting, including an amendment regarding the retail sale of marijuana and an amendment further simplifying Table 3, Dimensional Regulations. There was discussion about the parking facilities amendment that did not pass. Board members noted that no one was there from the business community to support the parking facilities amendment, which had originated with the BID and the Downtown Parking Working Group. Mr. Birtwistle thanked the Zoning Subcommittee for its work on the marijuana issues. There was discussion about why people didn't support the zoning amendment related to parking facilities.

There was discussion about the Net Zero article and limiting its scope to one site. Mr. Schreiber noted that the article allowed off-site generation as long as it was dedicated to the particular building that was being constructed.

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

**VI. OLD BUSINESS**

- A.** Signing of Decisions – none

- B.** Amherst Housing Market Study – Continue review and discussion about Chapter 6, Recommendations – Mr. Crowner reported on the discussion at the Zoning Subcommittee meeting that was also attended by Mr. Birtwistle. The ZSC discussed in depth approaches to housing and came up with a list of approaches that they would like to offer to the Planning Board. Among these approaches were the following:

- To do away with the General Bylaw related to condominium conversion;
- To allow converted dwellings in certain zoning districts, if they will be condominiums, to encourage owner occupancy;
- To remove dimensional requirements that are counterproductive to the construction of housing in the R-G zoning district, including frontage and lot size requirements;
- To allow certain types of housing that currently require Special Permits to be permitted by Site Plan Review or Administrative Approval, if they meet certain conditions;
- To allow the waiver of dimensional requirements;
- To develop Form Based Code standards that would allow an easier path to development of more housing;
- To allow cottage development or development of supplemental apartments and to make the existing regulations easier to use and more widely known;
- To adjust standards for mixed-use buildings, including more form standards;
- To require affordable units in mixed-use buildings;
- To allow Class II apartments.

The ZSC will develop a written list for the next Planning Board meeting.

The ZSC will meet at 5:00 p.m. on November 29, to discuss these ideas.

There was further discussion about the potential change in frontage requirements for the R-G zoning district and the introduction of a waiver of frontage requirement to match the neighborhood average or standard frontage.

The new condominiums on North Prospect Street were cited as an example of the right kind of infill in the R-G district.

- C. Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) – Review and recommendations on Transportation Guidelines: Crosswalk Design Standards – Ms. Gray-Mullen presented the Crosswalk Design Standards and stated that there would be a forum on December 5, for the public to give their comments to the TAC about the guidelines. Individual comments by Board members may be submitted to the TAC or the Planning Board may choose to submit comments as a Board.

Ms. Gray-Mullen gave a summary of the guidelines. She referred to the new crosswalk across from the Jones Library as a good example of the guidelines in use. The crosswalk is raised, the white lines are thermoplastic, which is a long-lasting material. The brick pattern along the edges is also thermoplastic, stamped to look like brick. The material can be made slip-resistant by including sand or glass beads in the thermoplastic.

Ms. Gray-Mullen emphasized that the main point of the crosswalk designs is safety and visibility. The thermoplastic, stamped brick would only be used downtown because of the expense.

Mr. Crowner MOVED that the Planning Board support the crosswalk design standards as presented and convey its support to the TAC and at the upcoming forum. Mr. Birtwistle seconded and the vote was 6-0-1 (Gray-Mullen abstained).

- D. Topics not reasonably anticipated 48 hours prior to the meeting

The Planning Board discussed its upcoming schedule. The Board will hold a brief meeting after the Zoning Subcommittee meeting on November 29. The ZSC meeting is starting at 5:00 p.m.

## VII. NEW BUSINESS

Topics not reasonably anticipated 48 hours prior to the meeting

## VIII. FORM A (ANR) SUBDIVISION APPLICATIONS – none

- IX. UPCOMING ZBA APPLICATIONS – Mr. McCarthy reported that the Appeal of the Decision of the Building Commissioner on Presidential Apartments had been withdrawn. There was an application for a supplemental detached dwelling at 561 Flat Hills Road. There is an application for cell phone antennae atop the D’Angelo’s Building in Downtown Amherst.

## X. UPCOMING SPP/SPR/SUB APPLICATIONS – none

## XI. 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 – no report

Design Review Board – Michael Birtwistle – no report

Amherst Municipal Affordable Housing Trust – Greg Stutsman reported that there would be meeting upcoming in the next few weeks. The AMAHT is also planning a forum.

Zoning Subcommittee – Rob Crowner, Greg Stutsman and Maria Chao – already given

UTAC (University and Town of Amherst Collaborative) – Greg Stutsman and Christine Gray-Mullen reported that the housing subcommittee would be holding a forum soon. There will be an economic development subcommittee meeting on 12/4 at 5:00 p.m.

Downtown Parking Working Group – vacant – Mr. Malloy reported that there will be a DPWG meeting on Friday, 11/17 at 10:00 a.m.

Transportation Advisory Committee – vacant – no report

**XII. REPORT OF THE CHAIR** – Mr. Schreiber noted that the Planning Board has a vacant seat and he recommended that Board members work on recruiting a new member.

**XIII. REPORT OF STAFF** – none

**XIV. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:12 PM.

Respectfully submitted:                      Approved:

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Christine Brestrup  
Planning Director

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Stephen Schreiber, Chair

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