

**MEETING
GEORGETOWN PLANNING BOARD
Master Plan Public Meeting
Memorial Town Hall
Meeting Minutes
March 27, 2007
7:00 P.M.**

Present: Mr. Rob Hoover, Chairman; Mr. John Moultrie; Mr. Harry LaCortiglia; Ms. Sarah Buck, Town Planner; Ms. Melanie Buck, Recorder

Absent: Mr. Hugh Carter; Mr. Tim Howard

Master Plan Discussion

Sarah Buck welcomes everyone.

Mitch Fischman and Erika Johnson from Daylor Consulting Group are in attendance. Erika Johnson is going to present and give an overview of the facts.

Presentation:

- Master Plan is a 10 to 20 year planning horizon.
- Policy guide, overall framework for where the town is going and where it should go.
- Recommend that the Master Plan should be looked at every five years.
- Looking for public input before plan is written.
- Pros: Civic buildings in town center, good base of buildings in town center, land available for industrial development.
- Cons: Lack of business tax base, lack of employment, no program to attract businesses to downtown.
- Charts show that every town in the area is facing a similar problem: high taxes on residential areas because there is not enough of a commercial tax base.
- Potential money is being lost from Essex County to outside retailers.
- Recommendations:
 - o Improved wastewater treatment: possibilities of a package sewer treatment facility, arrangement with Groveland, shared septic systems.
 - o Promote Mixed use Development in Downtown: housing as a conditional use, standards of compatibility.
 - o Establish a special village center zoning overlay district to guide town center development: establish geographic limits, define underlying zoning and overlay limits, use special permit process to allow appropriate new design.
 - o Establish design guidelines and a design review process: set framework for the expectation of character/quality of new buildings, allow for consistency of character of area, flexibility to work with land owners but sets up parameters for comments.
- Example of good development: Washingtonian Center.

Sarah Buck says that Erika has discussed leakage of sales with her previously and clarifies that there is a lot of money being spent on big box retail, just not in Georgetown. Enough money is being spent elsewhere that both big box and local retailers could be supported within Georgetown.

Rob Hoover opens discussion to the public.

Mike Garcia requests that the presentation be put on Daylor Consulting's website.

Erika Johnson says that the point is to balance downtown with the potential development. The discussion has really centered on whether or not big box retail is feasible and good, and if it can work with downtown.

Mike Garcia is surprised that 90 percent of the town's money comes from residential taxes and notes that a bigger commercial base would drastically change the nature of the community.

Erika Johnson says that change is more incremental and that in her experience towns have not experienced an immediate drastic change. The planning board will be able to look at each case specifically.

Arthur Rauseo owns the Georgetown shoe store. He wants to know where the land is available for the development.

Erika Johnson says that it will come from looking at the zoning plans. The town won't be taking land, but it will make the already available land more suitable for businesses to come in.

Mitch Fischman explains that allowing second floors to be used increases the use of the land without increasing the land itself.

George Comiskey wants to know the cost difference between one of the package systems and a central treatment system.

Erika Johnson does not know the answer. She could provide some general numbers but the town would have to do the specifics.

Jack Moultrie says that the town has looked at the cost of sewerage the downtown and the parts that should be sewerage are those around Lakeshore Drive and around the ponds. It would start centrally in the square. Mixing with Groveland was once a possibility but they were not in favor. Another possibility was building a treatment plant near the wells. After the water was treated, it would replenish the wells. These systems work well in other areas, but often people do not like the idea of the plan. The cost of all this is very expensive and the town would have to make betterment districts to do it. A local resident developed a preliminary proposal at one point but there was no money.

George Comiskey suggests that package systems would be more cost efficient and would deal better with chemicals that end up in the sewer. He wants to know if developers are going to

develop the area or if the town is going to develop the area. Is the town going to build it and wait for businesses?

Sarah Buck says that it's hard to sewer the whole downtown. She also does not know how much capacity is available with the smaller package systems. She says that Daylor has recommended that the Georgetown Business Group – the Alliance – work on economic development strategies, and that one way the town could help would be to figure out how to make very small scale systems work. If a Village Overlay District allowed property owners additional development potential, that might subsidize the cost of these small septic treatment plants. She suggests that would create incremental development in the downtown.

Richard Lappin says that there are two economic development issues: financial reasons and the character the town wants to have. A lot of this is focused on big box retail. He thinks that the town can support both downtown and big box. Before you make the leap, however, one needs to look at the cost of big box developments. Many people do not want big box. One needs to look at the benefits before they become ready to give up something that is important to them, such as character. One needs to know where all the money that the town already has is going and what the divides are. You cannot just say there is enough money for both. You need to specifically see how. It's important to do such an analysis. Rowley has made such analysis so perhaps placeCityGeorgetown could build on that. We cannot just assume that there is enough for everybody.

Rob Hoover says that one of the warrant articles this spring will be for Major Development Review. The planning board did not feel like they were in a position to change a zoning requirement with a maximum allowable store size like Rowley did. The Planning Board is going to vote on having large developments require a special permit so that the Planning Board can vote specifically on each development to save the character of the town.

Mitch Fischman summarizes the questions that Richard Lappin asked. He says that they cannot answer all those questions at that point, but says that Erika's slides display a lot of information. He says that Washingtonian Plaza was not what Georgetown should look like, it was just an example that big box can work with a town's character. It was an example to show that big box can be a walking area that becomes a meeting area for people where they can do multiple things. He does not know if that can be explained just through cost benefits. The question of the impact on existing business is a difficult question. You have to look at the mix of the uses. If you bring in a 7 to 90 thousand square foot Home Depot or Target for example, they have an urban solution and a suburban solution. Depending upon the desirability of the market place, it changes. The charts show that there is a pent up desire for the market so that you do not have to agree to the cookie-cutter big box model. They will come anyway and fit to the model the town wants.

Richard Lappin agrees. He wants to know if it is possible to dig deeper in to these issues so that the town can be better informed. Certainly the town can negotiate with developers, but he wants Daylor to do more for Georgetown specifically.

Mr. Fischman says that Daylor is building a guideline that towns can use so that developers will

know what they have to do to be allowed to build in a certain town. If it is a uniform approach across the board, developers will have to agree.

Rob Hoover wants to know if Mitch has been in a public versus private developer situation.

Mr. Fischman says that it is a back and forth process. He is currently working with a developer in Boston on a 42 acre site. The guideline of Boston is to develop mixed use housing with instituting multiple uses. The developer has a plan but he needed help from the city and state in terms of housing and infrastructure use. It's now a project that can meet the smart growth requirements. The developer is focusing on state programs that provide the motivation to fit the guidelines. You can't build all the infrastructure and then wait for businesses to come. You have to use development as a way of leveraging the infrastructure and, with the addition of state funding, it's feasible.

Harry LaCortiglia is a little disappointed. He thought it was going to be more in depth. He says that Erika's chart is out of date because it is from 2002. He says that the town has no bargaining strength. When the developments go in, the developers do anything they want because the town has no control.

Rob Hoover and Jack Moultrie do not agree. They say that they would have to go to the site plan review process.

Jack Moultrie says that it can be a variable process. If they ask for waivers, there is a bargaining chip.

Harry LaCortiglia says that without waivers, there is no bargaining chip. Special permit authority is completely necessary because, without it, the town is helpless. He wants the size limit lowered at town meeting. He says that developments can squirrel through the planning board easily.

Rob Hoover disagrees. He thinks the town has an ability to review. All the town can do is enforce the ordinances, but they have control. He does agree that the special permit is a very important warrant article. He wants the audience to be informed on the issue.

Jack Moultrie says that we are in a unique situation. The access road is already built and now the land down there is much more usable. Normally towns cannot afford that, but Georgetown used state funds to build the road. He says that the town has to be careful with what they do with the land and take it very slowly. If things are there that they don't want, the town can't change it. There's only one chance. Downtown is already built and a lot of the land is wet and therefore unusable. He doesn't want to move quickly and cautions against things getting out of control. He says that character is the most important thing. He says that the town is no longer really rural, but it is quaint and the character should remain.

Elizabeth Tollman says that she is worried because some of Daylor's numbers are from 2004 so she thinks that a huge growth in the town has occurred in the last three years that need to be taken into account.

Erika Johnson says that they can only use the data that is available. If they can get new specific data on what has been built, then they can do the analysis. The last economic census was released in 2005 and the data was last collected in 2002. It is the most comprehensive data that they can find.

Elizabeth Tollman says that six years is very outdated. There has been a tremendous shift since then.

Mitch Fischman says that they will try to look at newer numbers.

Elizabeth Tollman says that the school is a huge part of Georgetown. If there is a downtown development, the schools should be incorporated. She thinks that there are a lot of things missing from the report.

Erika Johnson says that there are a lot of other sections in the report pending. Right now the report only concerns economics. Later they will discuss parks, schools, residential community.

Kelly Devarenne says that she thinks that the schools need to play an intricate part in downtown. They are extremely close to each other. She thinks that you could do a recreation area somewhere, maybe at Pembroke.

Erika Johnson agrees that it is important, but says that those issues will be discussed in later chapters. The project needs to be segmented somehow even though many issues are interconnected. She thinks that it will seem clearer later on. Right now the project is only focused on economic issues.

Harry LaCortiglia brings the conversation back to the economics but acknowledges that the audience is making good points. He says that the data Daylor is using has not been updated. He was under the impression that Daylor was going to update the data to 2006. He wants newer numbers. Everything seems outdated. The list of businesses in downtown is very outdated and lists businesses that no longer exist. He wants to bring newer numbers into the equations.

Erika Johnson says that what she has is only a draft and that she has updated everything to the best of her ability. She requests that Harry LaCortiglia bring things to her attention if they are glaringly wrong. She says that there are a lot of facts they get from the Department of Revenue that they cannot update.

Harry LaCortiglia says that he thought the consultants were supposed to gather the data.

Sarah Buck clarifies that the economic census is taken in 2002 and 2007 and the reports are not sent out until two years later. She says that Erika is attempting to compare Essex County to other counties. Georgetown was growing at a fast rate in the last six years, but it has been growing quickly for many more years than that. She says that the outdated numbers are not always the fault of the consultants, but rather a constraint of available data.

Jack Moultrie asks if there is a guideline for who is included on the list of businesses.

Erika Johnson says that there is not. If they employ people, they are a business. She says that they try to give the best information possible while keeping the list relatively short.

Jack Moultrie wants to know if sole proprietorships are included.

Erika Johnson says that they try to include everyone but that they do not want to include irrelevant information.

Jack Moultrie questions sole proprietorships that are grandfathered in.

Sue Daigle is a sole proprietorship and points out a few others in the audience. She is concerned that they are not considered. She is active in the community and pays her taxes and wants to be considered. She thinks that her biggest fear is the big box because it will hurt the small businesses. She wants to hear what the planning board is going to do to help protect her and others like her.

Rob Hoover says that it is one of his biggest concerns. In general, Daylor has done a really good job and that it is a unique situation in that this is essentially a workshop where everyone critiques in order to improve the master plan. He wants Daylor to give more detail in their economic plan and wants a price.

Sarah Buck says that she has that price and will bring it to planning board tomorrow.

Rob Hoover wants a list of “if the town does this, then this”.

Joe LaMonicca is from Georgetown Pharmacy. He wants to know if economic development has to be commercial. He thinks that residential development would take care of itself and help everyone in the audience because they are store owners who serve the people. More people would help the store owners, but more stores will just hurt them.

Rob Hoover says that this is a difficult problem that multiple towns are facing. It is hard to know how to expand the tax base and, specifically, the commercial tax base. He doesn't think a residential plan would work.

Richard Lappin wants to know if you do residential plan, what will that generate in taxes versus what a commercial area would generate. This would allow the town to decide for itself what it wants to do. He wants to know if it is possible to do a concept analysis of what a commercial center would look like versus a residential center and what each would cost and give back.

Harry LaCortiglia clarifies it as a fiscal impact analysis.

Elizabeth Tollman adds that if there is a strong residential area, it will add money. She says that the school cost factor needs to be considered. She says that the commercial tax base needs to be expanded because residential taxes are not covering the school costs and the schools are failing

due to funding. She wants to know if there is a projection for 2010.

Alan Macintosh of the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission says that projections have been completed. They also looked at build out analysis which shows the developable parcels in the community to determine what the town can be developed into under the current zoning laws. This shows, in theory, the maximum population for the town. It does not show when the town would reach that maximum, however. It can be predicted by looking at growth trends in the past, but it's just an estimate. He says that they are on the website and that the town has them.

Rob Hoover asks if Alan has any comments he would make to the audience if he were a planning board member.

Alan Macintosh says that he would like more time to think, but cautions the audience against assuming that a master plan will answer all questions. He says that nothing can give all the answers and that sometimes no answers can be produced from the available information. He does not think that there are any answers at this point right now. He thinks that all the planning board can do is bring all the available information to the attention of the public and work together to move on from there. He says that it is difficult as a consultant to come into a town and tell it where to go in the future. He says that what a consulting group can do is raise the issues and the challenges and learn from the public. Collectively you can reach a judgment. The master plan cannot be prescriptive.

Rob Hoover thanks Alan and agrees completely. Georgetown is approaching a town meeting and needs more information. The town needs more information so that they can make their own decisions on what needs to be done.

Harry LaCortiglia wants to know if it is possible to use the build out analysis and work with a mapping project to show developability. He wants an honest square footage of what land is available for an industrial commercial base. He is wondering how much land is left.

Rob Hoover asks if this will be addressed in Daylor's land use chapter.

Erika Johnson says yes, but says that their data for that section is from 1999. She says that there are a whole set of constraints they put into the formula to show what land is and is not available for development. Based on that, they can get square footage counts.

Harry LaCortiglia wants to know if that would be in conjunction with Mass GIS.

Jack Moultrie says that it is necessary for Daylor to use the local wetland restrictions rather than those of the state because Georgetown's restrictions are stricter.

Erika Johnson says that they can get a general analysis for the town, but they do not have the time to do a parcel by parcel analysis. She says that the build out analysis was a general analysis as well rather than a parcel by parcel.

Rob Hoover asks if there is any way in which Georgetown is unique in the challenges it is

facing.

Erika Johnson says that Georgetown is facing the same problems as the surrounding towns.

Rob Hoover asks if there is any way that the other towns are doing things differently.

Erika Johnson does not know what other towns are doing.

Mitch Fischman says that they can explore that further in the future.

Harry LaCortiglia says that on the last page of the report it says West Newbury where it should say Georgetown.

Rob Hoover says that the home-based business section in Daylor's report is very large in comparison to everything else.

Erika Johnson says that it was similar to the 2004 plan. It seemed to be a big issue from beforehand so she did not want to take it out altogether. If the planning board thinks that it is unimportant now, she can take it out.

Harry LaCortiglia says that he does not remember the issue.

Sarah Buck suggests asking Alan Macintosh.

Alan Macintosh confirms that it was a big issue. With traffic generation and commuting, it is beneficial for the community to have people working at home. It is a way to generate jobs for people who live here and the town should actually be encouraging this.

Rob Hoover hopes that in the future Daylor will be able to address things such as the Christmas Tree Farm and what will happen to it in the future. How does Georgetown keep things such as that alive? He wants Georgetown to retain its diversity.

Harry LaCortiglia questions how the town decides who can and who cannot work out of the home.

Jack Moultrie says that people need to get permits to work in the home.

Erika Johnson says that she will increase that section of her report.

Wrap-up

Sarah Buck references the earlier comments about tying in the schools to downtown development. In the Master Plan, there are sections that address the connectivity of places and open space. These drafts of these sections are coming, and she encourages the public to post

ideas on the website so that they are included in the recommendations. She also wants to say that the new zoning that is up before town meeting about large retail is very important because it gives the board the ability to say yes or no at the end of the day. It allows the board to include fiscal impact analysis. She thinks that it will be very useful in looking in this type of development.

Rob Hoover says that one of the criteria for special permits is keeping in character with the town's character. It starts to open negotiations with the developer and move it in the direction that the town wants.

Sarah Buck says that the conversation is hugely important and says that there are new publications in the planning office that talk about big box retail and its effect on design and local retail. She invites the public to come in and get photocopies of sections that they are interested in. She says a handout has been distributed of the Assets and Liabilities of the Town that has been developed from earlier meetings. It would be helpful for people to review these and send comments to the website or the planning board. She has been very interested in the comments that have been posted thus far on the website. Someone made the point that you don't have to be current on every issue to comment.

Rob Hoover says that somewhere in the project under liability/assets you have to put the schools in.

It was added that the limited land available for school expansion is important.

Harry LaCortiglia wants to add recreation to that area of concern.

Elizabeth Tollman says that if the plan is a master plan, it needs to consider everything.

Rob Hoover agrees and thanks everyone for coming.

Sarah Buck says that the next meeting concerning the master plan is on April 11 at 7:00.

Meeting is adjourned at 8:50.