

PLANNING BOARD
SEPTEMBER 20, 2011 at 7:30 PM
TOWN HALL, 41 SOUTH MAIN STREET

In attendance:

Members: Judith Esmay, Joan Garipay, Jim Hornig, Michael Mayor, Kate Connolly
(Selectmen's Representative)

Alternate: Mike Hingston

Staff: Vicki Smith, Jonathan Edwards

Others: See Attendance Sheet

1. MINUTES: The minutes of September 6, 2011 were approved as amended.

2. DISCUSSION: OBSERVATIONS FROM DOWNTOWN TOUR

The Board conducted a tour of Hanover's downtown on September 13th, viewing locations of approved projects over the past 10 years including: Boloco, Morano Gelato, Nugget Theatre, Nugget alley, Ledyard Bank bldg, 63 South Main St, South Block, 6 South St, Lake Sunapee Bank/Maloney Associates bldg, 4 Currier Pl, C&A Pizza, Hanover Outdoors, Visual Arts Center, Spaulding Loading Dock, Salt Hill Pub, Hanover Park, Brambles, the Bridgman bldg, and the Coldwell Banker Redpath bldg.

Uses (Observed? Appropriate? Missing?):

- Uses observed include: government, lodging, restaurants (of which there are approx 26 in Hanover), banks, retail, office, real estate, gas station, parking lots, & garages.
- Uses missing: a grocery store, retail stores that offer the sale of useful/necessary items, and the appearance of residential housing, other than lodging. Board comments:
 - There are no provisions in the Zoning Ordinance that allow for the space desired by grocery store chains.
 - People must travel to W Lebanon for everyday shopping.
 - Destination shopping in W Lebanon is different because people cannot stroll from shop to shop.
 - Lebanon's pedestrian mall does not work since Woolworth's, the drug store, and the hardware store left the area.
 - Hanover's downtown offers more than Lebanon's downtown.
 - Residential units exist in the upper level of the Davison Block, the upper levels of all of the bldgs on South St, on Sargent Pl, and on the east end of Lebanon St. Units at 85 S Main St and the Hostel are less than a block from the tour route.
- It was questioned whether rental rates drive businesses out of Hanover.

- It was suggested that it is a combination of trying to attract out of town people and having to face Hanover's parking issues. A large part of CVS's success is because they have their own parking.
- Retailers that own their bldgs have an advantage over those that rent space.
- Big box stores are dominating the regional market.
- The "Nutshell Vision" prepared by the Downtown Vision Committee states, "*Commercial spaces should be available in the center of downtown to provide places to work, to serve the retail needs of daily life and to offer up opportunities to gather, relax and be entertained.*"
- People come to Hanover for entertainment: Nugget Theatre, Spaulding Auditorium, Hopkins Center, Hood Museum, League of NH Crafts, art shops.

Streetscape / Public Spaces:

- Was described as insufficient.
- A major element of public space that might work has not yet been finished (next to the Visual Arts Center).
- There are places where the only landscaping is tufts of ornamental grass, which is not appropriate in Hanover.
- A 1989 rendering of Main St was displayed. Its landscaping plan consists mostly of pavement material and big plants that do not require a lot of special attention once they are stable. The current trend is to reinstitute shade trees on Main St and lots of furniture. The many benches accommodate an outdoor life.
- ESMAY recommended reading "The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces", by William White, about where & why people gather and what's good about public spaces. The book is about NYC but its concepts apply everywhere.
- Use of the Dartmouth Green is mostly by students, but also occasionally for memorials, protests, farmers' market, etc.
- The Hopkins Center interior courtyard offers dining, is well landscaped, and gets a fair amount of activity for a courtyard.
- Use of the space in front of the Hopkins Center was questioned.
 - It is generally not used and not very beautiful.
 - There is no seating available.
 - It is difficult to maintain in the winter.
 - It will become more of a landscaped sitting area when the Inn project is completed.
 - Performance arts are conducted there.
- There are additional public spaces along South St & outside the Salt Hill Pub.
- The landscaping by the new hotel @ 6 South St was complimented.
 - The intent of the owners to maintain the landscaping requirements was questioned.
 - It was suggested that if it is in the proprietor's interest they will keep it up, however applicants that become absentee landlords are less likely to maintain landscaping beyond the 3-yr guarantee period following project approval.
- It was noted that the Town requires a lot of parking lot landscaping.
- Dietrich's concern for the parking area to the west of Spaulding was noted. The area is kind of a void.
 - Edwards said the Downtown Vision has specific recommendations for that area.

- The back of the Inn was noted as another area where things have gone awry perhaps because it was not given due consideration when developed.
 - It should be more attractive.
 - There must be a better way to combine traffic, materials handling, and architecture.
 - There are multiple property lines and easements in that area that make it difficult to straighten out.
 - There are conflicts of uses (College loading dock & short term parking for students to access post office vs adjacent businesses who want room to maneuver cars for parking).
 - If you add up the required parking spaces for that lot, and apply the zoning rules, it may be that there are no options to improve the space.
 - It would be helpful to the subcommittee that will undertake the issue of parking to know what the Board wants a parking lot to look like.
- Does it make sense to consider putting a well designed addition on top of the garage @ 7 Lebanon St?
 - Has there been any change in public attitude about parking in a garage that is as much as a block away from an intended destination?
 - The weekday garage patron count between 11:00 AM & 2:00 PM is quite numerous.
 - Studies show that shoppers, in particular, enjoy surface lots.
- Should the Board be prepared to be more lenient about parking to enable more parking opportunities?
 - Is it more appropriate to promote special car-type availability, such as zipcars?
 - Student parking adds another element to Hanover's parking issues.
- Buried utilities are much preferred to overhead wires.
 - Should there be a defined area where overhead utilities are not allowed? Perhaps within the boundary of the D district?
 - The opportunity to improve existing conditions within that zone arises when new projects are brought before the Board.

Buildings:

- Buildings should not be allowed any taller than currently exist.
- The mass of the Visual Arts Center was noted.
- Some of the exterior treatment of the new Life Sciences Bldg is interesting but makes it look larger than it normally would.
- It was questioned whether the plaza in front of the Life Sciences Bldg is too big.
 - The benches there are not comfortable and do not drain.
- Plantings around the hotel @ 6 South St were again complemented.
- It was questioned how downtown architecture will change in the next 50 yrs.
 - Edwards said the Downtown Vision Committee conducted a hard/soft analysis of the expected life span of different downtown bldgs and found that most should be pretty stable. Exceptions included the CVS bldg (before CVS came along), the Post Office, and the South St bldgs, which have since been replaced.
- A limiting factor for existing buildings is the interrelations between zoning parking requirements vs bldg size and use.

- Floor space in Hanover is used intensively. Almost every floor is fully occupied in downtown. 2nd, 3rd, and 4th floors in many other downtowns are vacant and basements are hardly ever separately rented out.
- There are also trends in the businesses that have left Hanover in the last 20 yrs as well.
- It is fascinating how well the downtown is doing based on the types of businesses currently offered.
- The Board was fortunate in that they were not bothered during the tour by huge areas of parking lots; cars were not that evident. They were buried in people however. Pedestrian traffic was very busy.
- Is there a serious proposal to put a pedestrian mall on Main St?
 - CONNOLLY said one was considered around the time Lebanon produced its pedestrian mall.
 - Smith said it was discussed in the context of an alley study conducted by the Regional Planning Commission in association with the Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber did not support it.

Public Comment:

Barbara McIlroy said when the Board reviewed the Inn project, she asked of plans for the area behind the bldg and was told that area was not part of the project. McIlroy suggested there is space there for additional parking if multiple parking levels are created.

Jay Lin & Leon Li expressed concern for pedestrian crossings at busy intersections on Wheelock Street and around the Green that are not signalized.

- CONNOLLY said Hanover has a lot of crosswalks, most of which are unsignalized.
- Edwards said a lot of pedestrians are not patient enough to wait for the signal at many intersections. He was not sure adding more pedestrian signals would promote pedestrian safety.
- ESMAY said pedestrian safety and making the downtown attractive for pedestrian use is well established as part of the Board's vision and planning. The actual equipping of the town for pedestrian crossings is not the business of the Planning Board but rather the Selectboard.

HINGSTON said he hoped the tour would help the Board recognize that the Town's regulations can be amended to improve the downtown based on the observations made. It is within the Board's purview to require more landscaping in front of a building rather than concrete, more large trees than smaller shrubs, more attention to how parking integrates with the rest of a site design, utilities be relocated underground, etc. The Board should now work to incorporate those revisions to enable the results the Board is looking for. ESMAY suggested tours of other parts of town may be just as useful.

2. OTHER BUSINESS:

Alteria development in Lebanon: Edwards reported that Lebanon's approval of the first part of the Alteria development is subject to the installation of a 2nd northbound lane on Rte 120 from Centerra to Greensboro Rd. This is contrary to Hanover's plan for that area which calls for reduced lanes in lieu of tree/lawn space, bike paths, and proper sidewalks. **It was moved by CONNOLLY, seconded by MAYOR, that Edwards follow up with the Lebanon**

Planning Dept and that Hanover protest the condition of approval by whatever means are immediately available. THE BOARD VOTED UNANIMOUSLY IN FAVOR OF THE MOTION.

Life Science Building tour: MAYOR reminded the Board of his invitation to join him October 7th for a guided tour of Dartmouth's new Life Sciences Building.

3. ADJOURN: The meeting adjourned at 9:30 PM.