

**PLANNING BOARD  
DECEMBER 6, 2011 at 7:30 PM  
TOWN HALL, 41 SOUTH MAIN STREET**

In attendance:

**Members:** Kate Connolly (Selectmen’s Representative), Judith Esmay (Chair), Joan Garipay, Jim Hornig

**Alternates:** Mike Hingston, Iain Sim

**Staff:** Vicki Smith, Jonathan Edwards

Others: See Attendance Sheet

**1. MINUTES:** The minutes of November 1, 2011 were approved as amended.

**2. DISCUSSION ABOUT A POSSIBLE HERITAGE DISTRICT IN HANOVER**

Carolyn Radisch said recent construction trends in her neighborhood are of concern to the neighbors. Tear-downs and new construction on undeveloped lots have dramatically changed the sense of living and walking down the streets. She spoke strongly in opposition of the construction of a new home on Downing Rd, comparing it to that of a “spaceship”. She said the neighbors feel that the character of their neighborhood is well defined and is of importance to the town as a whole. They propose the adoption of a Neighborhood Heritage District by way of a Zoning Ordinance amendment to guide new development and preserve their neighborhood. Establishing the district includes creating a neighborhood advisory committee to communicate between the neighbors, people moving in, and the Town.

Radisch said the Master Plan talks about preserving the character of a New England small town. She presented slides of newly constructed homes in her neighborhood and described them as being appropriate for a New Jersey subdivision, not a small town New England neighborhood. Radisch said the oldest houses in Hanover are located in her neighborhood. A light-handed approach can prevent their demolition.

Radisch walked the Board through portions of the Neighborhood Heritage Districts, A Handbook for New Hampshire Municipalities. She said her neighborhood meets the Handbook’s criteria for a Heritage District as it has “*a distinctive character with identifiable attributes that are embodied in its architecture, use, urban or rural landscape, and/or history that makes it an integral part of the municipality’s history*” and “*a recognized identity and a definable physical character that may have a high artistic value or a relationship to the municipality’s history or function that makes its conservation important*”. She displayed renderings of various buildings and streetscapes within her neighborhood stating that the range of building types and periods say the same thing “neighborly houses”. The buildings address the streets straight on, emphasize pedestrian entries, and de-emphasize auto storage (placing garages to the rear of the lots, not visible from the streets).

Guidelines of a Neighborhood Heritage District, taken from A Pattern Book for Neighborly Houses, were described as:

- maintaining consistent setbacks & defined street space
- house orientations with building mass parallel to the street
- parking behind / people in front
- emphasizing porches
- landscaping is helpful

Radisch said having an ordinance address those simple relationships would go a long way.

Radisch recapped that the proposal is for a very light-handed approach, applying simple guidelines for projects proposing new construction on previously vacant lots or the demolition of 80-100% of a residential structure in this specific neighborhood.

Public Comments/Questions:

- A River Ridge Rd resident asked what areas are proposed for the new district.
  - Radisch said roughly from the river to School St, including both sides of School St, Downing Rd, Sargent St, West St, Pleasant St, Allen Ln, and Prospect St. River Ridge is also of concern. 30 houses in total.
- Robin Nuse, of 8 Sargent St, spoke in favor of the proposal citing preservation of the numerous Victorian houses on Sargent St and the big contrast between the new houses on Weatherby and Downing Rds - one designed to match the neighborhood, the other was not.
- Bill Fischel, of 2 Read Rd, said the development of one house on Downing Rd has brought this issue up. That house was designed by Bernie Benn, a local architect, for Bill Nelson & Paula Schnurr, local residents. It seems reasonable to ask Mr. Benn to respond to these charges. Fischel expressed concern that the proposal discourages or would make lengthy the process of building a new home and could affect the sales of existing non-conforming lots. He said potential buyers will walk away rather than have to deal with a highly subjective neighborhood review board. In the alternative he suggested adopting a general garage ordinance for all of Hanover, except the RR zone, requiring particular standards & placements.
- Cynthia Barrette, of 9 Downing Rd, said the house on Downing Rd is completely out of place in every manner, shape, and form; particularly with respect to the garage. She clarified that the proposal would not inflict any type of architectural or style design. The issue is protecting the neighborhood and avoiding development like that of the new Downing Rd project.
- Janice Fischel, of 2 Read Rd, asked what would have happened if the plans for the Downing Rd project were presented to the neighborhood committee.
  - Radisch said the Zoning Ordinance would institute guidelines of what is important in the neighborhood (setbacks, garages, front door, etc.) The committee would not approve it due to its relationship with the street.
- Jed Williamson, of 7 River Ridge Rd, said what we need is to encourage neighbors to be in touch with their neighbors when considering construction.
- Alisa Brisson, of 3 River Ridge Rd, said there is a cohesiveness and comprehensiveness about that little section of town. She supports a light-handed review cautiously. She said she could see this as a positive and a negative for new buyers.

- Jim Doig, of 3 Sargent St, said a heavy hand would not occur as long as the neighborhood review is advisory only. That would be one way to avoid what seems to be an atrocious invasion of that neighborhood on Downing Rd.
- Mr. Fischell said the proposal seems more light-handed than the procedure outlined in the handbook provided. He suggested Radisch be more precise about what's being proposed and how it relates to the handbook's procedure.
- Susan Serat, of 2 Sargent St, said the relationship with her neighbors is particularly unique to her neighborhood. She supports the proposal as it addresses those existing relationships and new ones with people moving in.
- Ms. Nuse said houses that are the problem in the neighborhood are the ones where people did not talk to the neighbors. The zoning regs only deal with setbacks & building heights.
  - ESMAY clarified that the Ordinance also regulates lot coverage.

Staff Comments/Questions:

- Technical issues need to be worked out relative to meeting State law and fitting into the Zoning Ordinance.
- A final proposal is needed by February 2<sup>nd</sup> in order to meet the statutory timeline.
- Heritage Districts can get out of hand.
- Researching NH Preservation Alliance and NH Div of Historical Resources websites may be helpful.

Board Comments/Questions:

- If the Downing Rd house was reoriented, would the reaction be the same?
  - Radisch said if the garage was not sticking in everyone's face, if there was any attempt made to emphasize the pedestrian entry like every other house in the neighborhood, and if the setback was kept consistent, it would help.
- 3 out of 5 of the last construction projects in the neighborhood other than the 1 on Downing Rd involved 2-car garages, right in the front. It behooves us to get the garages behind or at the same level as the façades in the Zoning Ordinance now.
- There are 33 Heritage Commission in NH already. How long have they existed? How & why do they operate?
- The work of the NH Div of Historical Resources published their view that it is not necessary to go to statutory change to introduce the concept of heritage districts provided for by RSA 674:21 as an innovative land use control. Has that contention been tested in the courts?
- The residents' suggestion that this be an overlay district seems appropriate.
- The advisory committee should make their recommendations to the Planning Board rather than the Planning Director.
- "Decisions" of the advisory committee should be reworded to "recommendations".
- The proposal must include a good description of the defining neighborhood characteristics and its boundaries.
- The proposal's language should be deliberately vague, with a point to it. It should somehow reflect some of the traditions within the neighborhood without being too detailed.
- A Heritage District is not a mechanism to block change. There are property owner rights.

- The Residential Project Committee talked about increasing housing in that neighborhood. Would apartment houses be out of character? Where do they belong, if anywhere?
- How is the Board to make judgments on the advisory committee's recommendations? Keep in mind the difficulty the Board will have interpreting what they say.

Radisch asked for time to work together as a neighborhood to address the concerns expressed and return to the Board in January. Anne Downey, of 9 Sargent St, said it would be beneficial to inform Town Meeting voters of the percentage of residents in this neighborhood who support the proposal.

### **3. DISCUSSION ABOUT REGIONAL IMPACTS AND THE WORK OF UPPER VALLEY LAKE SUNAPEE REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION WITH CHRISTINE WALKER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Christine Walker said the process of reviewing projects of regional impact is specifically advisory only. The UVLSRPC ("Commission") has no authority as an organization to have input outside of the development of the regional process. There is no structure on a regional basis to make decisions.

Walker said 9 regional commissions and 21 other funders throughout NH partnered in an application to complete regional plans. They were granted \$3.1 million to create a development plan for the region, articulating what the communities in the region really want to see happen. A statewide advisory committee is looking at various pieces of the plan and seeking technical assistance for a variety of different elements, such as weather patterns. Over the next 3 yrs, every region will develop its own plan. Public outreach will be emphasized at the beginning of the process. Walker said 50% of the municipalities they assist have sent in letters of support.

Walker said part of last year's funding was designated to finish the housing needs assessment. That involved the creation of different maps depicting the region's issues and needs without identifying the municipal boundaries. Each municipality is dealing with very different issues & cultures in terms of where they are with ordinances. Some emphasize water quality, for others its economic growth. There are also large differences in home prices & tax situations from town to town. Claremont's water/sewer structure can service 30-35,000 people. Claremont's population is only 13,000. That presents an opportunity to focus development where there is already infrastructure.

ESMAY asked about the Vermont towns included in the group. Walker said the Two Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Commission and Southern Windsor County Regional Planning Commissions are in VT. Two Rivers received an additional regional planning grant. The housing needs assessment looked at the whole region, and then looked at sub-regions as far as labor market areas.

Walker said the Commission is partnering with the Town of Hanover to explore potential energy options funded by a Community Challenge Grant. One part of the study looks at driving distances to grocery stores and the alternative of utilizing convenience stores in closer proximity. The Commission has also joined the Mascoma HEAL (Healthy Eating Active Living) initiative, working with their school system. That project is looking at ways to

connect healthy foods and walkable communities. It is funded by medical insurance companies and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

HORNIG asked of the timescale of the grants. Walker said Community Challenge Grant work must be done by September 2013. The regional plan project must be done by December 2014.

ESMAY asked when the Housing Needs study will be published. Walker said a draft is available on their website. A summary is being prepared and may be available in February. Highlights include an increase in the 65+ age group, an influx of the 55+ age group moving to the area, and a significantly lower rate of the 15 & under age group. These are consistent with national trends although NH's birth rate is much lower than the national average, in this area specifically. There are also shrinking markets of 1<sup>st</sup> time home buyers and move-up buyers. Another interesting point is the cost of services for communities. Job growth is occurring in Lebanon; Newport & Claremont have experienced a negative job growth from 1990-2010 of close to 3,000 jobs. Housing growth in the region is very dispersed. The Commission is working with NH Housing Finance Authority & others on the needs of workforce housing. Walker said future projections for regional needs are really moderate and are based on the 1% growth seen over the last 20 yrs.

#### **4. REQUEST FOR VOLUNTARY MERGER BY DONALD AND ALINDA ROBERTS**

The applicants were not present.

Smith said there are currently 2 houses on these lots, 1 of which is in the process of being demolished. Zoning does not allow 2 residential buildings on a single lot in this district. If the merger is approved, the approval should not be filed for recording until the demolition is complete.

##### Board Comments/Questions:

- Applications for lot mergers should be presented to the Board with a written statement from the Zoning Administrator stating whether the proposal complies with zoning or what must be done to be in compliance.
- Is there a process to indicate when demolition is complete?

The Board agreed to postpone action on this request pending confirmation of its legality from the Zoning Administrator.

#### **5. OTHER BUSINESS:**

RPC: The Committee will meet next week as scheduled without staff to discuss Affordable Housing.

Meeting schedule: HINGSTON questioned when the Board would begin to address the laundry list of items identified during the Collier-era with the Board that remain unresolved. Does the Board wish to continue meeting once a month or hold some additional meetings to address these items?

The Board agreed to meet January 10<sup>th</sup>, rather than January 3<sup>rd</sup>.

**6. ADJOURN:** The meeting adjourned at 10:02 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Beth Rivard