

PLANNING BOARD
Valley Road Neighborhood Planning Party
October 5, 2014 at 11:00 AM
Dagmar's Place Valley Road

In attendance:

Members: Kate Connolly, Judith Esmay (Chair), Joan Garipay, Iain Sim; Nancy Carter (Selectmen's Representative)

Alternates: Brian Edwards

Staff: Vicki Smith

Others: Tim McNamara, Betsy McClain, Pat Hill, Randy Hill, Jolin Kish, Jon Fox, Darryl Hotchkiss, Ivan, Sheri, and Sofia Tomek, David Walden, Boris Makarov, Elizabeth DeSimone, Barbara Roth, Kelly Dent, Dale and Christine Eickelman, Martha McClaferty, Peter and Priscilla Runstadler, Martha Solow, Chris Kennedy, Jane Henry, Brian Pogue, Andy Bernard, Corinne, Bob Metz, Nina Lloyd, Charlie Garipay, Carol Weingeist, Joanna Starkey

Description of Neighborhood

When asked how they would describe their neighborhood or say what they like about their neighborhood, neighbors gave the following responses:

- Neighborly, quiet
- Neighborly
- Chase Field North
- Countryside in town
- Neighborly, out in the country, lots of trees
- Perfect
- Quiet, close, great for kids
- Quiet, proximate to town, backyards are serene and quiet
- Wild AT out back and down town in the front; the bridge between two beautiful parts of town
- Dagmar's Park
- Close to town
- Very desirable, walking distance to town
- We walk to what we do every day; we live outside the house; the AT culture is right outside our door; our kids sleep outside in hammocks; we know our neighbors and see them every day exercising or in the garden.
- Walking
- Walkability, rural (rural/urban) sound level, trees
- Thrilled with location, love forested nature of the neighborhood
- Growing hops, making beer in the garage, mixed use, 6 minutes from work
- Love basketball courts where you can play in the road, family/neighborhood orientation
- Small lots, intimate feeling, vegetation allows privacy even though homes are close together
- In 1935, this area was a pasture.

- Live-able residential, various housing types from single family to sorority to faculty housing at Park and Wheelock, Outreach House, pre-school all mixed with green space
- Walkable, families like the feeling that kids can play in the street
- A great location for a nursery school, quiet, safe
- Close proximity to downtown, green space, sense of neighborhood, woods, wildlife, environment and community
- Our kids have gone from stroller to wagon to scooter to bikes; this area is a treasure; our kids started at the playground and now they go to the high school.
- Walkable, calm, peaceful, not as busy as roads like Park Street; when you arrive here, you have left the noisy traffic behind.
- Magic, not a destination for anyone but residents

What could be changed or what would you like to see go away?

Neighbors suggested:

- Lots of through traffic and traffic complaints
- The neighborhood was different 50 years ago, the trees were so low that you could see the Vermont hills and Baker Library; Dagmar's Place has changed the neighborhood; The Town ought to look at establishing more pocket parks. On the land south of Valley Road extension, there should be another park with benches and a table so walkers would have a place to stop and rest and visit.
- Buses should not be allowed; children should walk to school.
- I would NOT like to see a committee established to oversee aesthetic considerations. I find that truly offensive and do not want what happened in the West End to happen here. Do NOT fall over the edge in judging the appropriateness of architecture.
- Cut through traffic and by the way, there are no school buses on Rayton Road.
- The advisory lane has reduced traffic, but outsiders use the outside lanes for parking
- The traffic calming on Buell Street has eliminated a lot of cut through traffic.
- The advisory lane is a useful experiment; we need benches on Valley Road Extension to assist walkers who might need a break on their way to and from the Coop and to encourage walkability.
- The advisory lane provides a place to walk, but I do not know if it slows traffic.
- Because of confusion at intersections, traffic is calmed. I like the advisory lane, but do not like the "gated" feeling you get with jersey barriers at Buell Street.
- Cars are slower with the advisory lane and move with caution. I feel more secure as a pedestrian. When I drive, I am more aware and move more slowly.
- Students need to learn to run facing traffic.
- I do not like gated neighborhoods- they are very off-putting. 24 mph is too fast. We need a lower speed limit.
- 25 mph is the lowest state law will enforce.
- Dana Road is a cut through road. We should try a cement barrier at the southern end as signs will not work to prevent cut through traffic. Is building sidewalks off the table? Can we consider sidewalks?
- We need better parking enforcement especially at the corner of Park and Valley near Outreach House.
- It was pointed out that reductions in traffic would result by increasing the number of walkable dwelling units in town.

Neighborhood Boundaries

A neighbor commented that South Park Street should also be included in the “RO” neighborhood meeting and future zoning efforts. Another asked why Haskins and Low were not included. The Planning Board relies on the neighborhood hosts to define the neighborhood boundaries. Some areas of town are included in two neighborhoods.

Dartmouth College Housing Plans

The College has taken another look at Rivercrest and plans for its residential development. Development of Rivercrest is envisioned as multi-phase. The location is not walkable for most people to the campus, so residents would be reliant on bus service. To be a desirable place to live, bus service would need to run at a frequency that is greater than the current hourly service.

Tim McNamara described housing Dartmouth makes available to faculty, staff and graduate students. There are 255 units at Sachem and 250+/- units in Hanover. The Valley Road neighborhood is very desirable because faculty can walk to their office or lab. These folks are so busy with their academic responsibilities that being able to walk to work is incredibly important and gives them more time with their families. Not many of the College tenants have children. There are very few graduate student rentals in this neighborhood. The graduate students tend to rent on West Wheelock Street and at Sachem. Based on behavior of residents at Park and Wheelock, there are 1.5 cars per unit.

Tim McNamara said that he thought A-Lot and Burton Road would be classic places for re-development. For Burton Road, the College would like to have multiple buildings with a higher density than what was constructed before. In the next few years, he hopes to work on zoning modifications that would allow that increased density. He thought that public open space could be accommodated there to balance the increased density. As for A-Lot, he agreed that it was under-utilized and that cars could be parked elsewhere close to campus.

Should We Allow Other Uses?

There was a great deal of support for accessory dwelling units and a comment that lots are actually large and could accommodate greater density. There is a great demand for small units close to town. Some felt that owner-occupancy was critical to the success of extra units on single family lots. Accessory dwelling units broaden the range of housing types offered in town. All agreed that there should be flexibility in providing housing options. Some expressed a preference for smaller houses. There was support for allowing accessory dwelling units without changing the exterior of existing homes.

One neighbor pointed out that accessory dwelling units are already permitted as attached units. The units can be no more than 1000 square feet which limits them to a single bedroom and the principal structure must be occupied by the owner. She felt the owner should be allowed to live in the smaller unit.

The point was made that demographics are changing and that young professionals do not want to have a car. A car is not needed in this neighborhood located so close to campus and the Coop.

The neighborhood currently has both single family and multi-family housing types which are geared toward younger people and younger families.

Businesses with low average daily traffic were suggested for the neighborhood as they have little impact. The Planning Board is leaning toward a more form-based zoning that would not be regulating land use based on activity in a building necessarily. A neighbor commented on the vacant feel of the neighborhood mid-day and her support for more business in the neighborhood as long as they are respectful of the primarily residential nature.

Another neighbor noted that this neighborhood is pastoral and quiet and conveniently located near the hustle and bustle of downtown. He felt the traffic issue must be addressed before a change was made to encourage business to locate here. It was noted that few professionals can afford to live in Hanover. Housing affordability was raised as a concern with the aside that had Dartmouth College not bought out the farms, and built housing, everyone present would be living in Bradford or some other distant town. His point was that there must be affordable housing made available in Hanover. Another neighbor warned against more units if neighbors did not want more traffic. In response, there was support for neighborhood diversity.

There was a suggestion about developing College-owned Burton Road and A-Lot with multi-family housing.

Another neighbor said that although there may be a more tolerant attitude toward commercial uses she was not sure that it would extend to renting. She found that rental properties were noisy.

Another neighbor had little faith in enforcement, especially the current complaint-driven enforcement.

Sidewalk and Lighting

To a suggestion made for sidewalks and lighting on Valley Road, there were more comments in favor of the advisory lane, than support for the sidewalk. The “white line” provides some feeling of security and is much less expensive to maintain. A long-time resident pointed out that 35-40 years ago there was a sidewalk and that remnants of it are still visible on the north side of Valley Road. She said it was never used. She commented that the white line is the best sidewalk we have had.

A neighbor related the expense involved with constructing a short sidewalk section at Verona Avenue.

The Bicycle Pedestrian Committee is a good place to discuss the merits of a sidewalk vs. the advisory lane.

Outdoor Meeting Space

One neighbor was enthusiastic about outdoor eating and would love to see an openness in the Town to allow a food truck or brick oven. She thought this to be an important aspect of community building.

Master Plan Update

There was a comment that the Planning Board should look at changes in the Town since 2003 and see if the Town indeed followed the guidance of the Master Plan.

Sustainable Hanover is going to help update the Master Plan. Resilience and sustainability will become the DNA of the Master Plan.

Questions

How many rental units exist in the neighborhood? How many graduate students live here?

Solarize Hanover

This town wide project will kick off at 6:30 PM on October 23 at the Hanover High School.

ADJOURN: The meeting adjourned at 1:00 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Vicki Smith, Scribe