

Economic Development Committee

Tuesday, November 15, 2011 7:00 PM
Old Library, 5 Fairbank St., Harvard, MA

MINUTES

Members Present: Rich Maiore, Chairman, Al Combs, Elaine Lazarus, Bruce Stamski, Jim Stevens

1. Minutes

The Minutes of the October 11, 2011 meeting were approved by unanimous vote.

2. Sign Regulations

The Committee discussed proposed modifications to the Signs section of the Protective Bylaw, as discussed at the last meeting and to address comments received from the Planning Board. Ms. Lazarus reviewed the changes made to the draft: 1) clarification of the area calculation of double faced signs; 2) clarification of how to compute sign area; 3) a provision allowing window signs at 20% of the window area; and 4) modification of the language relative to sites with multiple businesses. It was noted that these sections all seemed to address previous comments. The Committee discussed a provision in the current bylaw that is unclear, relative to accessory signs. It was decided that it would be clearer if re-worded to allow temporary signs advertising community events, without a maximum size and for a limited duration, possibly 21 days. Ms. Lazarus will draft the provision. The Committee noted that the Planning Board should be the entity to issue special permits for signs, and will make that change in the bylaw as well. The Committee decided to solicit the opinion of a few businesses on the proposed changes to see if they address the identified issues.

3. Recommendations

Mr. Maiore noted that one of the things that the businesses identified as needing improvement was the permitting process, and the businesses need it to be more predictable. He asked for ideas as to what the Town can do to improve this. Mr. Stamski stated the whole zoning bylaw should be looked at, and it needs to be understandable. An example was cited with respect to a business on Ayer Road that would like to clean up its stone wall in the front but is reticent to do it or even ask about it because it might trigger a big problem or process. Mr. Stamski stated that in the absence of daytime staff to answer questions like these, perhaps a concise, written guide would be helpful. He stated that the Committee should recommend a re-write/codification of the bylaw so it is clear and concise. It was noted that this would be a big job, probably requiring a consultant. Mr. Maiore noted that that the Committee had previously talked about auditing and updating the Town's regulations. The Committee discussed the advantage of having a single point of contact for businesses, but the problem that it would have to be a board member who is otherwise busy during the day. Mr. Maiore asked if looking into MGL c.43D might be a good idea, as it involves an expedited permitting process for certain properties. It was noted that it might be worthwhile looking into, but the Town might not be ready for it. Mr. Stamski noted that developers have a different way of operating and it is hard when they have to approach

individual boards one at a time, and it is better if they can get people all together to discuss a project or issues.

The Committee decided to recommend:

1. The development of a user's guide to permitting with an identified single point of contact, flow charts, etc.
2. An audit of the Town's permitting system, bylaws and regulations to make sure that it is up to date and realistic.
3. Better communication of a more proactive, pro-business message on the part of the Town.

Mr. Maiore noted that Littleton and other towns have links to local businesses on their web sites. Also suggested was an annual town business/town hall meeting where the Board of Selectmen and business owners come in and talk to each other about issues. It was noted that there could be a "Shop Harvard" initiative. The Committee discussed ways to deal with/address the questions that businesses have, such as the stone wall issue. It was noted that members could attend the meetings of other boards and act as advisory liaisons or advocates for businesses, depending on the issue. Mr. Stevens stated that's one reason for the Committee's existence, and suggested sending a letter to each of the business that lets them know the EDC's role and what we can do to further their goals. The Committee agreed it would be a good idea, and Mr. Stevens will draft the letter.

4. Master Plan Update

Mr. Combs updated the Committee on the status of the work to update the Master Plan. He noted the first phase is to identify the vision for the Town that will set the scope for phase 2, which will be a prioritized list and a process. He noted there are 7 categories of big issues identified, and the C District is one of them. He stated that for each category, more specific areas to be addressed will be the outcome. All were encouraged to attend the upcoming visioning session.

Adjourned: 8:30 PM

Approved:

Documents used at the meeting:

- *Meeting agenda*
- *Proposed Sign bylaw – 11/21/11*
- *Draft Minutes of October 11, 2011 meeting*