

Economic Development Committee

Tuesday, July 10, 2012 7:00 PM
Old Library, 5 Fairbank St., Harvard, MA

MINUTES

Members Present: Elaine Lazarus, Chair, Chris Ashley, Sandy Chapman, Jim Stevens
Members Absent: Rich Maiore

1. Minutes

The Minutes of the June 12, 2012 meeting were approved by unanimous vote.

2. Discussion – Grocery Store White Paper

The Committee reviewed a draft outline of the information to be gathered for the “white paper”, an analysis of what the Town would need in order to accommodate a grocery store.

Ms. Lazarus reported on her conversation with a Roche Brothers Real Estate Analyst in June. She stated that Roche Brothers builds full-size stores of 40,000 to 50,000 sq. ft., but they also have a smaller store concept for smaller markets, of 20,000 to 25,000 sq. ft. She noted that in Harvard, a small concept store would be more likely. She stated that for the small concept store they would want about 140 parking spaces. She stated that she was told that a standalone small concept store would need about 4 acres of upland, but it depends on what the setback, green space, parking etc. requirements are, because the higher the requirements, the more land that is needed. She stated that Roche Bros. prefers to locate along with other retail stores, especially a pharmacy. With respect to utilities, they like to have natural gas and prefer municipal water; and would prefer not to have a septic system but would work with a property owner/developer to figure out a suitable system/solution. She stated that the Analyst stated that he has been driving around the Ayer, Groton and Harvard area lately looking for potential locations, and likes Harvard because they are aware that a significant number of Harvard residents are using the Acton store. He expressed interest in receiving information about specific Harvard locations.

The Committee welcomed Lou Russo, owner of land in the C District, including 11 undeveloped acres across the street from Dunkin Donuts. Mr. Russo related the history of his property development on Ayer Rd., and suggested talking to Hannaford about a store too, as they had been interested in the area before. Mr. Russo pointed out some areas of the bylaw that might need to be changed to accommodate a grocery store, such as §125-39 which requires green space of 50% plus 20% of lot area in excess of 3 acres, which penalizes large parcels and is inconsistent with the intent of the Ayer Rd. Village Special Permit. He also noted that the limit on grocery store size is also a limiting factor. He noted that given traffic studies that were done for his development proposals, he thinks that a grocery store may result in the need for a traffic light, which has not been warranted to date. He stated that the Ayer Rd. Village Special Permit has worked well and is a good tool to use.

The Committee asked Mr. Russo's advice about tackling the grocery store use, which residents have said in surveys that they want. He advised incremental changes so that it is easier for people to address and accept. When asked about what kind of interest there has been with respect to potential tenants, he stated there has been no demand for retail space, low demand for office space, and stronger interest in medical office space. He stated that with respect to retail, the Commercial district will feed on itself such that an anchor store will bring in smaller uses, and those smaller uses aren't going to materialize until the anchor is there.

Mr. Russo stated that with respect to utilities in the C district, they are lacking; a public water supply well takes up a lot of land, and sewage disposal is difficult too. Mr. Chapman noted that Devens has water and sewer capacity available, and runs a good operation. Mr. Russo stated he has explored a sewer connection to Devens in the past. It was noted that there are Protective Bylaw provisions that make certain sewage disposal options difficult, and that package treatment plants are allowed with an Ayer Rd. Village Special Permit. Mr. Ashley described the mechanism established for the sewer district in the center of Town, and how it could be applied to the C district by changing the map at town meeting. It was noted that within a municipal district, something might be possible. Mr. Russo stated he has been able to install water mains in the Rt. 2 right of way, and obtaining the permit from MassDOT only took one week. Mr. Russo noted that solving the water and sewer issues in the C district will take time to resolve, as there are political and financial issues.

Mr. Russo stated that the size of the gas line was increased when he developed the property and that the C district lacks water for fire suppression systems, which adds to the cost of development. He stated that the lack of water requires that there be storage in cisterns.

At the conclusion of the discussion, it was decided that Mr. Stevens will follow up with Hannaford, Mr. Chapman will look at traffic issues, Mr. Ashley will examine the utility issues, and Ms. Lazarus will analyze the zoning.

3. Community Solar Garden, C District

Due to the absence of Mr. Maiore, discussion of this issue was postponed to the next meeting.

Adjourned: 8:20 PM

Elaine Lazarus, Chair

Approved: Sept. 11, 2012

Document used at the meeting:

- Draft Minutes, June 12, 2012 EDC meeting
- White paper outline, entitled "Grocery Store" dated 7/10/12
- Meeting agenda