

Economic Development Committee

Thursday, January 31, 2013 7:00 PM
Public Library, 4 Pond St., Harvard, MA

MINUTES

Members Present: Elaine Lazarus, Chairman, Sandy Chapman, Jim Stevens, Bruce Stamski
Members Absent: Rich Maiore

Ms. Lazarus opened the public forum and provided an overview of what the Committee had been working on for the last year. Items included working with the Planning Board to make changes to the sign bylaws at the 2012 annual town meeting, participating in the phase 1 master plan process, looking more at the physical viability of linking to Devens for water and sewer, and communication with existing business owners. It was noted that the legislation including Harvard in the Devens Economic Target Area was signed by the Governor in August.

Ms. Lazarus noted that based on the master plan survey results and also looking back at the EDAT survey, the Committee noticed that a grocery store was high on the list of services that residents want. She stated that the Committee decided to initiate a white paper review to identify opportunities and potential barriers to locating a grocery store in the Commercial (C) district with respect to traffic, zoning, infrastructure, grocery store needs, etc. She noted that Committee members spoke to representatives of Roche Brothers, Donelan's and Hannaford as part of its research, and reviewed the Protective Bylaw. The initial findings were noted:

- Proximity to Rt. 2 is a plus and the area closest to it may be a more desirable location;
- There is sufficient traffic volume and demographics to support a grocery store, but the composition of the traffic would be looked at by prospective stores more closely because of the nature of commuter traffic in particular;
- According to one of the three store representatives, it is more likely that a small concept store would locate in Harvard than a full size one due to the size of the market;
- The zoning accommodates a small concept store but not a full size one;
- Municipal water and sewer is not necessary for a grocery store;
- Grocery stores prefer to locate with other stores, especially a pharmacy;
- The presence of the Hannaford in Ayer seems to affect whether a grocery store will locate in the C district.

Comments from those in attendance included the following, which were discussed by the commenter with the Committee:

- Whether a large store could locate in the C district;
- Had feedback from North Harvard residents been sought;
- The white paper should address mitigation for grocery store development;
- The Town should consider a village concept with sidewalks, etc.;
- How does the Devens market focus on manufacturing affect the C district and a grocery store – does it make it more likely – are there more customers?

- Prefer if a grocery store could be located in the part of Devens that Harvard might take over;
- A grocery store would provide jobs for local teens;
- A grocery store and associated retail could provide jobs and support services for residents;
- The piles of dirt across from the Dunkin Donuts are unsightly and the owner promised that they would be removed a while ago;
- Don't let the C district get to look like Rt. 110 in Westford;
- The traffic issues are a concern and there should be accommodations for pedestrians;
- Concerns about the visual impact of a grocery store/retail plaza need to be addressed;
- Pharmacies should be asked if they are interested in locating in Harvard;
- Don't become Westford.

Ms. Lazarus noted that additional comments are welcome by email at edc@harvard.ma.us with respect to a grocery store or any other C district issue, and the Committee is also seeking ideas as to future projects. It was noted that the Committee hopes to have a website someday that can help to promote the Town and engage citizens, that a market study of the C district is also being discussed, and a visual depiction of buildout as well. The Committee thanked everyone for attending the public forum.

Adjourned: 8:00 PM

Approved: March 14, 2013

Documents used at the meeting: A map and aerial photo of the C district