

Economic Development Committee

Thursday, November 21, 2013 7:00 PM
Old Library, 5 Fairbank St., Harvard, MA

MINUTES

Members Present: Jim Stevens, Chair, Rich Maiore, Vice Chair, Duncan Chapman, Elaine Lazarus, Christopher Sintros, Peter Warren

1. Gas Station/Convenience Store – Mike Jacobs

Mike Jacobs, Glickman Kovago and Company, joined the Committee. He stated that he is a retail developer who develops CVS, Cumberland Farms and other outlets, and this evening is representing Nouria Energy, which owns and operates 125 gas stations, some with convenience stores. He stated the company is based in Worcester and has an expansion plan, intending to build new stations in the area. He noted that Harvard is desirable because it does not have any gas stations, there is a lot of traffic and it is a high income community. He stated they have done a demographic analysis, a traffic study and have researched the bylaws. He referred to Protective Bylaw section 125-13.X, which limits the size of a tank to 5,000 gal. He stated after conversations with Town Hall, he understands that a gas station is allowed but the tank size is too small. He stated a gas station would need a 40,000 to 50,000 gal. tank. He stated that the larger the tank, the fewer delivery trips there would be, and that the tanks have a 40 to 50 year life span.

Mr. Maiore asked if they would share the traffic analysis with the Town, and Mr. Jacobs replied yes. He stated it was estimated that there are 16,100 average daily trips on Ayer Road. He noted that the gas station/convenience store would be about 3,500 sq. ft. in size and would use an acre or less. Mr. Chapman asked if he would consider a larger development with more uses, such as a CVS, if a site large enough was obtained, and Mr. Jacobs indicated they would. Ms. Lazarus asked what the assessed value is of a property with a gas station/convenience store as proposed, and Mr. Jacobs stated that the one in Berlin is assessed at \$1,300,000 and one in Boylston is \$1,400,000. In response to a question, he stated they are looking at 4 potential sites on Ayer Road. Mr. Maiore asked if they would be interested in additional improvements, such as sidewalks, and Mr. Jacobs stated it is typical for Nouria to make off-site improvements. Mr. Stevens asked what the timetable is for the development. Mr. Jacobs stated they would negotiate with property owners, which would take 30 to 60 days, then prepare a conceptual plan for submission to the Town (60 to 90 days), then go to town meeting for the zoning change. He stated after the vote, then they would submit a site plan to the Planning Board for approval. He stated the intention would be to break ground as soon as possible.

Ms. Lazarus asked if their analysis indicated that Route 2 is a strength that makes Harvard an attractive location, and Mr. Jacobs replied yes. Mr. Stevens stated the Town is interested in maintaining its character, and asked how a gas station/convenience store maintains the character of the Town. He asked if there are security concerns with respect to theft, and how is this typically dealt with. Mr. Jacobs stated he has been surprised elsewhere that gas stations are not the biggest challenge. He stated that people want the conveniences, and aesthetically, the

Planning Board will dictate the aesthetics, preserving the character. He stated he isn't aware of any security problems at Nouria facilities. He stated the basic question is whether people want the facility, and if the Town doesn't want it, they will go elsewhere. Mr. Maiore asked how the use ranked in town resident surveys, and it was noted that it was not ranked high. Mr. Maiore asked about lighting, and Mr. Jacobs stated that is easy to address.

Ms. Lazarus stated that it was her understanding that a gas station is not an allowed use, and was surprised that others indicated that it was. She suggested that there should be clarification of this issue before going too far. The Committee recommended that Mr. Jacobs follow up with the Town Planner for a clarification of whether the use is allowed and to schedule a discussion with the Planning Board.

2. Suzanne Dutkewych

Suzanne Dutkewych, resident and realtor, joined the Committee. She stated that people move to Harvard for the schools, the rural nature of the Town, and for the quiet. She stated that curb appeal is key, and the Town is wooded and there aren't a lot of developments here. She stated that the C District area is interesting because of the residential-commercial mix, and people count the stops along Route 2 in deciding where to locate. Referring to the previous discussion, she noted that a gas station/convenience store will increase traffic and could frustrate the residents. She noted that the Town could look at Rt. 119 in Groton as an example of what it could do, with an attractive mix of old and new, commercial and residential. She stated the key is *how* the area is developed.

She stated that if the Town had a vision for the area that it could work toward, that would be helpful. Mr. Stevens agreed, and noted that the EDC was established to work toward the long term sustainability of what Harvard residents moved here for, by trying to alleviate the tax burden on residents so that good quality schools can be maintained. Ms. Dutkewych asked how much commercial revenue is needed to maintain that appropriate level. Mr. Sintros noted that with the Town's aging population and declining school enrollment, this can indicate a future problem. He asked how she sees the residential real estate market given those circumstances. Ms. Dutkewych stated people aren't developing new residential housing here, and there isn't much turnover. She stated that real estate is tied to the quality of the school system.

The Committee discussed the demographics and assisted living facilities, one of which had been proposed in the C District in the past. It was noted that assisted living and medical uses could provide tax revenue and services for residents.

3. 2014 Public Forum

The Committee discussed whether it should hold a public forum in the spring. It was noted that such an event would be beneficial in terms of visibility, communication, and to generate a dialogue with residents about specific uses, such as gas stations.

4. Minutes

The Committee voted unanimously to approve the Minutes of the October 24, 2013 meeting.

Adjourned: 8:30 PM

Approved:

Elaine Lazarus, EDC member

Documents used at the meeting:

Meeting Agenda

Draft Minutes, October 24, 2013 EDC meeting