



# TOWN OF NORTHBOROUGH PLANNING BOARD

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Approved 5/7/13

## Planning Board Meeting Minutes January 30, 2013

**Members Present:** Rick Leif, Michelle Gillespie, Leslie Harrison, George Pember, Theresa Capobianco

**Others Present:** Kathy Joubert, Town Planner; Fred Lonardo, Inspector of Buildings/Zoning Enforcement Officer; Tom Blasco, Amy Jo White, Brian Smith

Chairman Leif opened the meeting at 7:00 pm.

### Review of Zoning Amendments for Town Meeting

Ms. Joubert reviewed the updated version of the proposed zoning amendments from last night's Planning Board meeting, as follows:

- Delete Floor Area Ratio (FAR)
- Reduce multifamily maximum number of units to 8
- Increase maximum front setback in the Business East & West districts
- Change wording on pg 751 and 7-06-030
- 7-09-020D4 – remove "of side", add 50% of open space in front of buildings
- refer to subsection 5 to require landscaping
- add 'and shall be landscaped in accordance with subsection 5 below' - this allows that buildings could be built further back from the street with more attractive landscaping in the front.

It was determined that landscaping and placement of open space are the concerns.

Ms. Joubert stated she has highlighted every section that has to do with density and dimensional regulations.

### Parking

Ms. Joubert suggested changing the amount of parking in front of the building. She stated it now reads parking can be no closer to the front property line than the front line of the principle structure. Parking could be on the side. The special permit granting authority has the ability to allow up to 15% of parking in front of the main structure. If a maximum 75-foot setback is allowed, that is more than 15% of parking. Ms. Joubert explained she increased the percentage of parking in the front to 25%.

Amy Jo White, 23 Brigham Street, asked about the parking in front of Limoncello at 290 West Main Street.

Ms. Joubert explained that development was built before the zoning was changed. The barn is in the front, so all of the parking on the side.

Ms. Harrison asked if the parking at 96 West Main Street is on the side.

Ms. Joubert stated the end of the building is the front and the parking area is on the side.

Ms. Joubert stated it's the orientation of the building that determines the principle entry faces toward the street, but there is no principle entry for 290 West Main Street or 96 West Main Street.

Mr. Leif stated the door is on the side of the new building at 162 Main Street and, based on the zoning, the applicant needed a variance to put the entrance in the rear of the building.

Ms. Joubert stated there is a door on the Gladwalt Road side of the building and technically it meets the bylaw because it's a corner lot. The applicant needed a variance to allow the principle entrance to be located in the rear. Ms. Joubert asked the members if they want buildings situated so their entrances can be anywhere.

Ms. Harrison replied she does not.

Mr. Leif asked Ms. Harrison what her issue is if the building does not have the principle entrance in the front.

Ms. Gillespie stated it's the issue of having parking in the front of the building. By beefing up the landscaping in the front of the lot, it's almost natural that people wouldn't park in the front of the building. She stated she wants to avoid another development like Kendall Place.

Ms. Harrison stated the Metrowest dentist building looks great and Tony Abu's developments look great, but she does not like the Kendall Place development or the "Boost" building.

Mr. Leif stated he wants zoning to force a principle entrance facing the street and facing the side, but zoning says the front of the building would be defined as what faces the main street.

Ms. Gillespie asked about the development that may be proposed for the Pierce gas station site on West Main Street.

Ms. Joubert stated one of the 3 proposed buildings would have to face the street to conform to the current bylaw. If the zoning is changed, the developer would not be able to use his proposed plan.

Mr. Leif stated he agrees with Ms. Joubert's change for parking, and the other members also agreed. He stated they want to avoid all parking in the front and the building in the back. He stated they want to maintain that for corner lots or for any lot that has a

defined front, but there would be limited parking in the front and some landscaping to buffer the parking from the street.

Ms. Joubert suggested adding to the sentence "no parking shall be located closer to the front lot line than the front line of the principle structure nearest to the front lot line".

Regarding E5, Ms. Joubert stated she doesn't think anything needs to be changed. It relates to off-street parking design standards, sidewalks, landscaping and the building. It will result in the "318 Main Street" look.

Mr. Leif noted it would require a sidewalk.

Ms. Joubert stated E6 deals with landscaping between the sidewalk and the right of way. People feel safer on the sidewalk if there's grass or something between them and the street.

Mr. Leif reviewed as follows:

- Changes to Business East and Business West will try to better manage the look and feel of mixed use and commercial development and the density of them.
- FAR will be deleted.
- The number of multifamily units will be reduced to 8.
- The maximum front setback will be increased to 75 feet.
- Open space is required and 80% of open space would require landscaping.
- Up to 50% of parking will be in the front of the building.
- The front of the building will be defined as the front line of the principle structure closest to the street.
- The density requirement will stay the same.

Ms. Joubert noted warrant articles need to be submitted to the Town Administrator's office on Friday. At the meeting next Tuesday, she will have drafts of the changes discussed this evening and will send it up to the Town Administrator's office to meet the deadline.

### **Signs (7-09-040)**

Ms. Joubert explained she and Mr. Lonardo were asked to look at the following two issues regarding signs by the Selectmen:

#### **Temporary signs**

The issue seems to be with temporary A-frame signs that are lined up along Route 20. The main offender is Maney's Plaza and the building at 4 West Main Street. People don't get permits for them and if they do, they don't abide by the permit. She stated she went through many towns' bylaws and the planner's list serve, and reviewed the current sign bylaw - Section 7-09-040G - Signs in Business Districts. People don't abide by the required 30-foot distance between signs. She noted her revisions are in red. The main

change is that the temporary sign can only be displayed in front of the business. It can't be on the street. It can be put on the sidewalk in front of their building, but not on the main street. That's what the Board of Selectmen wanted.

Ms. Gillespie stated Maney's Plaza is designed with a 1970's look, with parking in the front. Nobody is every going to see a sign in front of those businesses.

Ms. Joubert stated the bylaw allows for the business owners to put them on a message board. Maney's Plaza is the biggest issue. There is only 1 free-standing sign and it just says "Northboro Plaza". It could have 2 free-standing signs with every business listed and could have some kind of board that could be changed or an electric message board so everyone could have something advertising their business. The bylaw doesn't need to be changed.

Ms. Capobianco stated if the bylaw allows this, then they should do that.

Ms. Joubert suggested getting rid of temporary signs but the BOS may not want that. Northborough is unique in that they are allowed on property that is not owned by the business owner.

Ms. Joubert stated she and Mr. Lonardo have not gone to the BOS yet because they wanted to see where the board stands on it.

Mr. Pember asked why the BOS wants it.

Ms. Joubert explained they have been getting a lot of complaints about them.

Mr. Pember stated a lot of temporary signs make the town look awful and trashy. Finally the BOS are reacting to it.

Ms. Joubert explained Bill Farnsworth had to send letters to all businesses in violation. It created a storm and then all the businesses started calling the BOS, some of them in tears, saying the sign bylaw was ruining their business.

Ms. Capobianco asked if this bylaw change will stop Rocky's Ace Hardware from putting pallets out with signs on them.

Ms. Joubert replied it will, as they have never been allowed.

After discussing it, Ms. Joubert and Mr. Lonardo chose to say temporary signs are all right, but they have to put them where they are appropriate.

Ms. Gillespie explained when they wrote the bylaw, they asked business owners and developers for feedback and came up with something good. She asked why that same process can't be done again, and if something has gone out to the business owners and stake holders.

Mr. Leif stated they would have to go to the BOS to do that.

Ms. Capobianco asked when the BOS asked them.

Ms. Joubert replied they asked her and Mr. Lonardo three weeks ago.

Mr. Lonardo stated Bill Farnsworth had been working on it for a longtime.

Mr. Smith asked Ms. Joubert if the other bylaws she looked at dealt with this the same way.

Ms. Joubert responded that some towns don't allow temporary signs at all, some are silent on them, and some allow them, but put a parameter on what it is. Some allow A-frames or not anything else and there are some that allow them to have them close to the business.

Ms. Capobianco reminded the members that Ms. Joubert and Mr. Lonardo had only 3 weeks to research and revise the bylaw. She explained she didn't know if she would like to see none at all, or something like what Ms. Joubert and Mr. Lonardo have written.

Mr. Leif asked if there is a way to do both in order to give businesses a chance to advertise.

Ms. Harrison stated it won't stop the calls to the BOS.

Mr. Smith stated this will be a bigger and bigger issue with the development coming on Route 9, and it's good to get it into the bylaw now.

Ms. Joubert explained the bylaw now allows temporary signs with a 45-day limit and placed a minimum of 30 feet apart from each other.

Ms. Harrison noted the signs on Blake Street are not on their own property.

Mr. Lonardo stated the issue will not go away and needs to be addressed correctly. He explained he doesn't know what the best answer is, but staff has to look at the issue to see what's best for the business owners and the town.

Ms. Joubert explained when the sign bylaw 15 years ago, it took 3 years to create it. They worked with any resident and business owner who wanted to participate. One area of that bylaw that was a sticking point was temporary signs. They are not good looking and are still an issue today. Ms. Joubert suggested she and Mr. Lonardo may want to go back to the Town Administrator and present what they have suggested and discussed with the board. She stated it makes sense for the Planning Board to look at the sign bylaw over the next year.

Mr. Lonardo stated it is not easy to keep track of the 45-day limit. It's hard to enforce.

Ms. Joubert stated there is enough work involved with it to justify a part-time code enforcer who could go around town checking on permits. Only then will the town get a handle on this and there will always be people who just don't care about the law.

Mr. Leif stated they could change the wording by taking out C and adding "30 feet apart".

### **Applefest Banner**

Ms. Joubert stated every year in the past there's been an issue with the Applefest banner placed in the downtown. Because of signs like this, she has added another section to the sign bylaw for town-sponsored events.

Ms. Gillespie asked about banners and lawn signs.

Mr. Lonardo stated banners are put up by the town. Signs that go up and down are not a big issue. However, some never seem to go away.

Ms. Joubert suggested looking at banners and lawn signs as well.

Mr. Lonardo stated it's the duration of time the sign is up that's the problem.

Ms. Gillespie requested they discuss real estate signs. She stated she understands the size limit and the need for it to be located on the premises. However, if someone has an open house on Whitney Street they need a sign to direct them to the open house.

Ms. Capobianco stated the real estate signs have been an issue in the bylaw. To the extent there is an issue with the open house bylaw, it could be as easy as saying the temporary signs with direction to the open house any time of the day of the open house and not on the property on which the open house is located, and must be taken down the day of the open house. Specifically has to say "Open House", and only on the day of the open house, and it has to come down at the end of the day.

Ms. Gillespie stated if a sign was placed at the end of Brigham Street with an arrow pointing down the street toward the open house, it would not be allowed. However, if someone had an open house, they could put it out and bring it back in the day of the open house.

Ms. Harrison stated, regarding new construction, perhaps they should have a requirement that the developer would have to have a sign with all businesses on it.

Mr. Leif suggested requiring no temporary signs in new developments, so the tenants would know going in that they have to comply.

Ms. Joubert stated some towns address the sign bylaw by placing it into the general code with no grandfathering.

Mr. Leif proposed leaving "c" out and adding changes to town sponsored events and open house.

Mr. Lonardo suggested to Ms. Gillespie that the Design Review Committee might have a discussion regarding open house and real estate signs.

**Next Meeting:** The next meeting will be held on February 5<sup>th</sup>.

The meeting adjourned at 9:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Debbie Grampietro  
Board Secretary