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## **PLANNING BOARD**

### **September 21, 2010 - Minutes**

A meeting of the Orleans Planning Board was called to order at 7:00 p.m. in the Nauset Meeting Room at the Orleans Town Hall. **Present: Chairman:** Kenneth McKusick; **Vice-Chairman:** Chet Crabtree; **Clerk:** John Ostman; John Fallender. **Associate:** Chip Bechtold. **Planning Department Staff:** George Meservey; **Secretary:** Karen Sharpless. **Also Present: Board of Selectmen Liaison:** Jon Fuller. **Absent:** Steve Bornemeier and Paul McNulty

### **VILLAGE CENTER ECONOMIC STUDY**

Chairman McKusick welcomed the approximately 40 business owners and residents to this special Planning Board meeting for the presentation of a report on the Village Center Economic study which has been in progress for the past year. McKusick explained the background of this undertaking with a description from the Orleans Town Charter indicating that the Planning Board may make recommendations to town meeting, the Board of Selectmen and the Town Administrator regarding the physical, economic and environmental development of the town. McKusick noted that in the Orleans Comprehensive Plan there have been discussions and recommendations have been made to town meeting as well as the Board of Selectmen resulting in actions taken over the last 10 years. McKusick read from the Orleans Comprehensive Plan a section which notes that the Village Center is the central gathering place of the town and the importance of fostering a vibrant town that is attractive, functional and meets the needs of the residents and visitors. McKusick noted that the Orleans Comprehensive Plan states that the town should continue to pursue a vision for the Village Center that maintains character and economic viability in the future. McKusick noted that through the years there have been multiple meetings and workshops regarding the Village Center and changes have been implemented. McKusick stated that the purpose of the meeting is for the Planning Board to get feedback from business owners and residents on the direction of future Village Center actions. McKusick informed attendees that there is a Planning Board Village Center subcommittee which will hold meetings and the Planning Board will make recommendations to the Board of Selectmen at an upcoming meeting in order to try to move forward with the process.

George Meservey thanked attendees for taking the time to come to this meeting. Meservey noted that the town has had long-standing goals of a healthy, vibrant village center. Meservey stated that the Planning Board has recently formulated a set of goals and objectives for the Village Center with the intent that they result in action steps. Meservey noted that the Planning Board analyzed the factors that limit growth in the Village Center, such as building codes, Title 5 codes, parking requirements, and other local zoning regulations. Meservey stated that a couple of years ago the Planning Board conducted a visioning exercise with a graduate student in landscape architecture who looked at the potential for infill development and for better design in the Village Center which resulted in the zoning bylaw change allowing 3 floor development only in the Village Center District to allow for residential housing.

Meservey noted that the Planning Board is interested in the local economy and will look into the idea of a streetscape plan regarding the physical development of the downtown infrastructure.

Meservey gave the following introduction for Peg Barringer from Finepoint Associates as the speaker for this meeting: *"Peg has conducted economic and financial analysis, market research, training and other services for government agencies, financial institutions, real estate developers and non-profit corporations in over 100 communities. She has consulted on a wide range of project types including: commercial real estate development, downtown & business district revitalization, microenterprise & small business development, creative economy initiatives and a large array of customized research & analysis projects. For the last 16 years, she has also taught in the Graduate Program of Urban Policy & Planning at Tufts University."*

Using a Powerpoint slide presentation, Peg Barringer gave a summary and analysis of the findings from multiple surveys conducted with residents, business owners and visitors over the past summer with the following observations:

- Surveys were done in collaboration with the Planning Board, Planning Department, the Orleans Chamber of Commerce and Suffolk University.
- Many survey respondents expressed confusion over the exact location of the Village Center and which businesses are included in that district.
- Various studies, meetings and zoning bylaw amendments over the past 10 years for the Village Center.
- This study was undertaken in order to determine what presently exists in the Village Center and how it fulfills the needs of businesses, residents and visitors and what changes could make it more viable.
- There are 189 businesses in the Village Center using over 600,000 square feet of commercial space.
- Powerpoint slides were used to demonstrate how the survey respondents would like to see the Village Center proceed and what other types of businesses they want to see in the Village Center such as clothing stores, discount stores, specialty food stores, alternate restaurant types, and entertainment.
- Findings from the Market Assessment showed a desire for improved sidewalks and bicycle friendly areas, an expansion of the farmers market, special events, better signage, expansion of parking options, and cooperation between businesses to improve overall sales.
- Business and mixed use density should be encouraged in the downtown to provide additional shopping opportunities, with retail on the first floor and offices on the upper floors.
- Retail storefront transparency encourages people to window shop and go into businesses for more shopping opportunities.
- Many people indicated that they use the internet to shop and obtain business information, which would make it advantageous for local businesses to use the internet to promote their goods and services.
- There would be an advantage to marketing retail goods and services in a convenient way for bicyclists to take advantage of, since the rail trail route goes through the center of town.
- Business owners have stated they notice an increase in business when there are seasonal events, such as Christmas in Orleans and the 4<sup>th</sup> of July festivities.
- Multiple entities such as the Planning Board, Planning Department, the Chamber of Commerce and the Orleans Improvement Association have worked toward improving various aspects of the Village Center.
- There are advantages to providing relaxing areas which are conducive to allowing people to sit and enjoy outdoor activities such as street musicians for a vibrant downtown.
- Barringer indicated the need for a separate group or organization whose main focus the successful maintenance or enhancement of the Village Center, as opposed to the Chamber of Commerce which basically focuses on the needs of its members.

- One of the drawbacks of the Orleans Village Center is that there is no sense of having arrived at a destination.
- Eliminating overhead wires (such as burying them underground) could open up the Village Center area and make it aesthetically more pleasing.
- Creating “gateways” into the Village Center would give visitors a sense of where the Village Center begins and ends.
- Large parking areas can tend to discourage the idea of a walkable town due to their expanse of blacktop. More landscaping could be used to enclose the areas and create a more aesthetically pleasing area.
- Minimum and maximum setback requirements could be used to create more aesthetically pleasing walking areas and avoid breaks in the “street wall” facades.
- Signage could be used for direction to businesses or parking areas.
- Business clusters for similar businesses could be used to increase foot traffic in multiple businesses.
- Creation of open walking connections between Main Street and Cove Road would promote business traffic.
- A multi-business website, or social internet technologies (such as Twitter or Facebook) could be used by businesses thus fostering increased foot traffic, since it would be easier for people to find information for businesses before they arrive.

### **Discussion**

Various business owners raised the following issues:

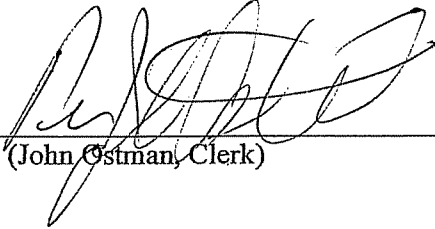
- The need for better signage for businesses and parking.
- More downtown parking areas near businesses.
- How to create a more walkable downtown since businesses are sometimes quite a distance from each other since the Village Center District is large.
- Encouraging small independent business in town.
- Revisiting the formula business bylaw issue.
- Creation of nodes of businesses within the Village Center.
- Collaboration to move forward with a cohesive plan.
- Creating better aesthetics.
- Education and training of business staff members to create a friendly business atmosphere.
- Fill storefronts to create a wider array of merchandise for shoppers to view.
- Creation of landscaping to encourage people to stay in town, not just pass through town.
- Collaboration with high school students on the creation of a business website.
- Different areas of the Village Center may need different aesthetics.
- Work with the Chamber of Commerce on downtown issues, despite financial constraints.
- Link to Chamber of Commerce website.
- Better signage on walkway from Main Street to Cove Road and better maintenance of Town parking lot, including better lighting and a safer surface for walking.
- Snow Library has many programs year-round for resident and visitors.
- Academy Place businesses do not have decent sidewalks and are generally not easy to walk to.
- Consider the idea of an Urban Designer.
- Foster collaboration between businesses and the Planning Board in order to move forward.
- Bring suggestions and recommendations to the Board of Selectmen in an effort to move forward.

**ADJOURNMENT**

**MOTION:** On a motion by John Ostman, seconded by John Fallender, the Board voted to adjourn at 8:53 p.m.

**VOTE:** 5-0-0 The motion passed unanimously.

**SIGNED:**



(John Ostman, Clerk)

**DATE:**

9/28/10

**LIST OF HANDOUTS FOR SEPTEMBER 21, 2010 PLANNING BOARD MEETING:**

1. *Orleans Village Center Economic Analysis Summary Report, Finepoint Associates*