

TOWN OF STOW PLANNING BOARD

Minutes of the December 15, 2005, Planning Board Meeting with MAPC for Village District Zoning.

Present: Bruce Fletcher, Planning Board and Lower Village Sub-Committee Member
Ernest E. Dodd, Planning Board and Master Plan Committee Member
Kathleen Willis, Planning Board Member
Malcolm FitzPatrick, Planning Board Member
Donna Jacobs, Master Plan Committee and Associate Planning Board Member
Karen Kelleher, Planning Coordinator, Lower Village Sub-Committee and
Master Plan Committee Member
Mark Racicot, MAPC
Judy Alland, MAPC

The Meeting was called to order at 9:30 AM.

Mark Racicot updated Members on the Visual Preference Survey held on October 6, 2005. Members then discussed details to be considered as part of the Village District Zoning bylaws for Lower Village and Gleasondale to be developed by MAPC under the Priority Development Fund Grant.

Kathleen Willis noted that the Commercial section on Route 111 in the Town of Harvard is a good example and suggested that the Planning Board take photographs and get a copy of the Town of Harvard's design guidelines.

Donna Jacobs noted that this speaks to the need for design guidelines. Mark Racicot said that is not in their scope, but the draft bylaw could reference design review guidelines.

Mark and Judy provided sample mixed-use bylaws for Board Members to review. It was noted that Sudbury's Village District encourages re-use of existing structures. This concept was incorporated into Canton's bylaw as a buffer to its downtown area.

DISCUSSION: POTENTIAL LOWER VILLAGE AND GLEASONDALE VILLAGE DISTRICTS:

Boundaries and Area Definitions

- Bylaws are to be written for two areas: Lower Village and Gleasondale. Each one will have a main area (an "A" zone) and a secondary area ("B" zone).
- The A zones will have higher intensities of use and will encourage retail and restaurants on the first floor.
- The B zones will have lower intensities of use and will allow professional offices, but not retail, on the first floor of existing homes.
- In Lower Village A, the overlay will include only the parcels in the Business Zone.
- Gleasondale A will include the Mill parcel and the hill behind it. The Mill parcel could include almost any use. The hill is needed for sewage treatment (see discussion of sewer options, below).
- Lower Village B should include both sides of Route 117. The proposed transition zone may be too limited and should perhaps be extended on the Maynard side of Lower Village to include all of White Pond Road frontage (residential and commercial zones).
- Gleasondale B should be mostly residential. There are 50-60 potential lots here, and the bylaw should encourage alternatives to cookie-cutter subdivisions.
- Uses in both transition areas ("B" zones) could be the same.

Purposes

- Lower Village: 1) Increased diversity of housing and more affordable housing; 2) Redevelopment; 3) Make it more profitable for owners to redevelop the shopping area and more attractive for customers to go there. Ability to develop residential units should act as an incentive. Bylaw should encourage lot consolidation, but not along Red Acre Road.
- Gleasondale: 1) Diversity of housing -- affordable and market-rate housing, including potential for live-work spaces; 2) Revitalization; 3) Amenities, retail, and services at that end of town.

Housing

- Provisions should be as in Section 8.9, Inclusion of Affordable Housing.
- May want to add middle income as in Active Adult bylaw.

Housing Issues/Options:

- Stow's housing provisions limit affordable units to homeownership and rule out renters. It would be worth considering whether some affordable rentals might provide more diverse housing options and help meet an unmet need.
- The Active Adult bylaw requires that 10% of the units be affordable to purchasers with incomes not to exceed 80% of median and that an additional 5% of the units be affordable to households with incomes not to exceed 150% of median. Since the 5% is a very modest set-aside and 150% is high (almost \$100,000 for a family of 2; \$124,000 for a family of 4), perhaps the Town might target a narrower band such as 100% of median. The draft Bedford bylaw includes the following language: "The Board may require that an additional 5 percent of the total units be affordable to households with annual family incomes of 81-100% of area median."

Density

- Setting density limits allows the Town to use density bonuses as an incentive, but may result in uninspired, formula-driven development. Alternatively, the Town may use its Special Permit leverage and design standards, rather than fixed density limits, to guide good design; the Town cannot then award density bonuses, but can use other incentives such as reduced open space or parking requirements.
- Board members expressed frustration that developers often do not propose good design. They agreed to start with no density limit, but good standards.
- Need size limits that will prevent big box development.*
- Broad design standards should be included in the bylaw.
- The Town also needs to create more detailed Design Guidelines, but not within this bylaw.

Size limit issues: The Town does not want to lose existing large structures such as the supermarket. It is a challenge to craft a bylaw that distinguishes adequately between desirable and undesirable "big box" structures.

Uses

- Lower Village A– Town wants versatility here; front buildings should be a mix of residential, office, and retail; back buildings can be all residential.
- Gleasondale A– 1st floor of the mill should be offices or retail.
- Prohibited uses & use restrictions
 - Should underlying zoning be changed?
 - Need noise provisions to protect all residential uses
 - Need to limit hours of some businesses, if they are near residential
 - Veterinarians and veterinary clinics but not veterinary hospitals, can be allowed, if design includes noise protection
 - Do not allow "big box" structures (see discussion of size limits above)

Minimum Lot Size

- No minimum size except in B areas
- In Gleasondale B, don't want teardowns

Unit Sizes

- Maximum = 1200 square feet; no minimum
- Allow for variety of sizes and types

Open Space

- Don't call it "open space" – perhaps call it public space
- 10% ok
- Buy-out provision is another option – Developer could purchase open space nearby or contribute to municipal open space fund.

Historic District Limitations

- There are no restrictions in either area, but a bylaw shouldn't encourage the destruction of homes in Gleasondale or Lower Village. Historic structures should be preserved with provisions for adaptive reuse.

Town Boards

- The Special Permit Granting Authority is the Planning Board.
- There should not be a separate advisory Design Review Board to administer Design Guidelines. Bylaw should include sufficient parameters to allow the Planning Board to deny a poorly planned project.

Parking

- A bylaw should require/encourage off-street connections to adjacent lots.
- Donna will send existing draft of shared & connected parking provisions.
- Shared parking should be designed for Saturday morning peak (see APA chart).
- Off-site parking is acceptable within a reasonable distance.

Hiring Consultants

- M.G.L. Chapter 44 Section 53G: Town should be able to use this provision to hire consultants to assist in development review, including design review

Sewers

- In Lower Village, lack of a sewer system limits the ability to establish restaurants. Alternatives include:
 - Tying to Meeting House development, which needs more flow to work efficiently or
 - Tying to Maynard sewer system
- In Gleasondale, sewer system needed to enable Mill development. Alternatives include:
 - Building a system on the hill parcel or
 - Tying into Hudson system

TIMELINE

- It is unreasonable to aim for Annual Town Meeting. Fall would allow more time to educate the public and address citizen concerns.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 11:10 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Kelleher
Planning Coordinator