

TOWN OF STOW PLANNING BOARD

Minutes of the February 13, 2008, Planning Board Meeting.

Present: Planning Board Members: Ernest E. Dodd, Laura Spear, Kathleen Willis,
Leonard Golder and Steve Quinn

Planning Coordinator: Karen Kelleher

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m.

PUBLIC FORUM – PROPOSED LOWER VILLAGE MIXED USE OVERLAY DISTRICT

Ernie Dodd began the meeting by introducing Board members. He explained that the intent of the proposed Lower Village Mixed Use Overlay District is to provide the opportunity for property owners to make Lower Village more of a village and viable. The proposed bylaw will add a residential component that is not otherwise permitted. This proposed bylaw is the result of efforts by Metropolitan Area Planning Council under a Priority Development Grant for the creation of affordable housing and smart growth development. MAPC conducted a visual preference survey at meetings at Hale school two years ago. Based on input on the visual preference survey, MAPC came up with a proposed bylaw. MAPC's draft bylaw was further revised by the Planning Board. This is the first public meeting to receive input from residents.

Ernie Dodd then went through a power point presentation to outline the proposed bylaw and Map.

Residents Questions and Comments:

- It seems that the Board is putting the cart before the horse. There are water, sewer and traffic needs that should be addressed.
- The rest of the Town gets a free ride on this area. The Town needs to invest in traffic improvements.
- Goals are important, but what are we doing to get Business in Lower Village?
Response: Linear Retail (Stow Shopping Center) had an issue with their septic system and is now installing a treatment system. Most of the other businesses have water problems. The Town is working with Assabet Water Company and property owners on a proposal for a privately owned and operated public water supply. DEP recently awarded a low interest loan to Assabet Water Company for the proposed Lower Village water system. We also hired a consultant for a traffic study analysis.
- Commercial Development should not be promoted on White Pond Road due to its proximity to the Assabet River and the Wildlife Refuge.
- My property on White Pond Road is located in the proposed Overlay Area B and I was not consulted. Why are some residential properties (Heritage Lane) excluded?

Response: The purpose of this meeting is to seek input from property owners. The proposed Overlay Area A on White Pond Road is mostly zoned Commercial now. The proposed Overlay District adds less intensive uses. The goal is to provide for a less intensive use with a residential component. This area is the last commercially zoned property and the Board would like to provide the opportunity for economic development.

- Residential properties on Pompositticut Street should not be included in Overlay.
- The proposed Overlay Area B will drive residents away from the village.

Response: The intent is to create a transition zone, allowing for existing homes to have something like a Real Estate Office on the floor and a residential dwelling on the second floor.

- Why not focus on other areas such as Harvard Acres or the Town Center?

Response: The Board focused on the Lower Village based on the history of Lower Village as being a historic village.

- The existing business district is small and full of vacancies.
- Expanding to Mixed Use along Red Acre Road and Pompositticut Street is premature. You should wait until you have the district established along Route 117.
- Why would someone want to change his or her residence to mixed use?
- I live near the Lower Village Common and it makes sense for her property to be zoned for mixed use because it would contribute to the village. She helped restore the Sawyer House and would be in favor of a theater or colonial teahouse. It does not make sense for Red Acre Road or Pompositticut Street.
- Some in attendance said they do not support any transition zone. Some said they would support a transition zone only along Route 117.
- I live next to the Veterinary Hospital and it is not a compatible use. Lighting is objectionable and people walk their dogs on my property.
- The 60,000 sq. ft. limitation in Area A is 50% larger than Shaws. A 60,000 sq. ft. store would serve the region. I don't want to serve the region.

Response: There is no sq. ft. limitation in the underlying district. Shaws currently serves patrons from other towns.

- You need to allow some growth or the businesses will move out. You don't want to attract competition across the street.
- Zoning should reduce the developability of White Pond Road in exchange for an increase in development on Route 117.

Response: It is hard to create a village feel on Route 117. The Board felt that the White Pond Road area would lend itself to a village feel.

- Is there a model of village zoning for towns with lack of infrastructure such as Stow?
- What about traffic?

Response: We have plans to install pedestrian refuge islands in the spring. This bylaw encourages pedestrian access between curb cuts. It facilitates access across parcels. It also provides for sidewalks, open space and shared parking. We are trying to create a pedestrian friendly village.

- I like the idea of making Lower Village look like a village but don't know how we can get there, if people have properties now that they can't lease. The upstairs of the building where Domino's is/has been vacant for years.
- We haven't been successful in attracting business because Stow's population is only 6,000.
- The plan disperses what you want to do. It expands the area to promote willy-nilly growth.
- People do not want 24-7 businesses (including deliveries). There is a tremendous amount of traffic from Astro Crane all hours of the day and night. Let people live- where they live now - live there.
- I am disappointed in Lower Village Planning. I thought it would include traffic, water and septic. Planning efforts should be for what we need, not just what you wish for.
- Affordable housing can happen anywhere.

Response: This bylaw came out of a grant from DHCD. DHCD was trying to promote affordable housing. Mixed Use is a state tool to create affordable housing. We are trying to accomplish a balance of economic vitality and diverse housing. Stow has no place for your adult children and no place for Bose Employees. We have addressed housing needs for older people.

The intent is to retain the structure facades in Area B. Stow already adopted a bylaw to allow flexibility for historic structures. Photos of the Tea House located on Stow Road in Boxborough, which contains a mixture of uses (Tea House, Law Office, Child Care) and Moods Salon on Route 111 in West Acton.

- It is not only what it looks like. It is more than what it looks like. It is what it sounds and smells like. It is what it will do to the traffic.
- Goals are important, but what are we doing to get business in Lower Village?
- Kostas of Stow House of Pizza – I want to make the property better. The Town has been working with me on water issues.

- Who received announcements for this meeting? Will there be more meetings? If a copy of the map were provided with the announcement, more people would be here.

The plan is to bring a bylaw amendment to the May 2008 Town Meeting. Additional informational meetings will be held as well as a Public Hearing. Whether another mailing is done will depend on the Planning Board's budget.

- Have you considered other options for affordable housing?

Response: Yes. The Town adopted an Affordable Housing Inclusionary Bylaw that requires 10% affordable housing on a development that creates 6 or more units. The Villages at Stow, a Chapter 40B development with 25% affordable units, is currently under construction. The Active Adult Neighborhood Bylaw has a 10% affordable housing component. The Arbor Glen AAN and RidgeWood Estates AANs are approved. Some AAN units will be built on-site and the developers will pay a fee in lieu of construction of some of the units. The fee will be placed in the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, which currently contains approximately \$70,000.00.

- You are trying to do too much at once and therefore, the proposal lacks focus.

Response: The grant under which this bylaw was crafted was for the Town of Stow and the Town of Bedford. The Town of Bedford has been very successful with their mixed-use development bylaw, which was enacted in 2005. Mixed-use development has already been constructed.

- Why address the proposed zoning in stages?

Response: That sounds like the direction you want us to go in.

- Sewer would be a problem for residential uses.

Response: Additional land area would be freed up for septic system expansion when a public water supply becomes available.

- Have you thought about tying into the Town of Maynard Water or Sewer?

Response: Yes – The Town of Maynard turned down proposals for both water and sewer. Linear Retail tried to work out an agreement to tie into Maynard's sewer system and Town Meeting turned it down. White Water/Assabet Water Company proposed tying into Maynard's Water Supply and that proposal, which was also turned down by Town Meeting.

- Do you plan to close down Gardner Road?

Response: The Plan is to remove the portion from Papa Gino's to Route 117 (the portion where through way traffic is restricted) and add it to the Common.

- Why not close off some of the Shopping Center Entrances?

Response: The property owner is resistant to a reduction in curb cuts. The Planning Board will work with the property owner when a proposal comes before the Board.

- You should concentrate development in the existing Business District rather than diluting it.

Ernie Dodd thanked everyone for their input, and explained that it is the Board's intention to bring a proposal to a Special Town Meeting. Additional public meetings and a public hearing will be held before Town Meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Kelleher
Planning Coordinator