

TOWN OF STOW PLANNING BOARD

Minutes of the July 28, 2008, Planning Board Meeting.

Present: Planning Board Members: Ernest E. Dodd, Laura Spear, Kathleen Willis and Steve Quinn
Planning Coordinator: Karen Kelleher
Planning Board Consultant: Sue Sullivan, Places Site Consultants

Also Present: Fire Chief McLaughlin
Police Chief Trefry
Sgt. Lima
Superintendent of Streets Mike Clayton

The Meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m.

HIGHGROVE ESTATES

Members met with Highway and Public Safety Departments to discuss the Highgrove Estates Preliminary Subdivision Plan. Applicants Barbara and Barbara-Anne Sweeney and their Engineer, Rich Harrington of Stamski and McNary, Inc. were also present.

Laura Spear explained that the Planning Board met informally with the Applicant to discuss the proposed Plan. A public meeting will be held tomorrow. The Plan shows access from West Acton Road. The Planning Board is concerned about the access road, as shown on the plan, with a 10% grade with switchback. The Applicant anticipates the proposed road becoming a public way. The backup plan shows an emergency access from the Town of Acton.

Sue Sullivan said the Plan meets Stow's Subdivision Regulations in terms of the curve/linear road and grades but, when you look at them in common on the proposed plan, she is concerned from a safety standpoint. With a 10% grade you typically want a straight shot.

Those present noted other roads with 10% grades. Trefry Lane is 10.5%, but doesn't have the curve. Pilot Grove (Warren Road) is about 10%, but not as steep. Birch Hill is 14%.

Mike Clayton said a 10% grade on a sharp corner will be very difficult in the winter. He said the Highway Department already gets calls about Trefry Lane and that is a straight shot. He also noted that drainage on West Acton Road is a huge concern. The proposed road is more on the east side of the hill and will be very shady, making it susceptible to freezing. Mike noted that he saw an alternate plan showing access from the Town of Acton.

Chief McLaughlin said he prefers access from West Acton Road in Stow because the response time would be doubled if they had to go through Acton. Rich Harrington said one reason they proposed access from the Town of Acton is because of the wetlands crossing. They need to look into that option before going to the Conservation Commission.

Laura Spear asked Mike Clayton if he would recommend Town Meeting Acceptance. Mike said he would not want to accept the road as shown on the preliminary plan. The grade is too much

on the corner and plowing will be difficult. Drainage is also a huge concern. It would help if there was a way to reduce the grade. He said you wouldn't believe how many calls they get on Trefy Lane. The Council on Aging Van actually slid down the road when it was parked.

Chief McLaughlin shares Mike Clayton's concerns.

Sue Sullivan noted there are many other steep-grade roads that are straight and have a clean line of sight. She said that with this layout with wetlands, grading, retaining walls, etc., you won't be able to see.

Chief Trefry noted that when it starts snowing, cars can't get up and down Warren Road. He is also concerned about access from Acton because it increases the response time. They don't always have a 4-wheel drive vehicle.

Ernie Dodd is very concerned about the proposed entrance. Access from Acton, although straight, is also a significant slope.

Rich Harrington said he met with the Acton Town Planner, Roland Bartle, who explained they have regulations prohibiting road access only from Acton. Rich explained that other access points from Stow are too steep. The proposed road is in character of the neighborhood in Acton, which is all 10% slopes. If they are below 40 units, Acton would not want a cut through. He said maybe a through road with two entrances is better. He said they are dealing with strict elevations. The concept is for 10% grade that levels out at the point of development of the proposed homes.

Mike Clayton said an 8% grade at the intersection is too extreme. He also suggested not adding any runoff onto West Acton Road.

Rich Harrington said the road approach is the highest point on West Acton Road. They had to go with 10% grade to get above the wetlands. He can look at the possibility of lowering it some at the wetlands. The alternative is a conventional subdivision, connecting into Acton roads. That would also require a subdivision in Acton. It would be a 10% grade at the intersection in Stow.

Rich Harrington said they will look at sight lines. He can also look into providing turn-out points.

Sue Sullivan said it doesn't take a very tall tree or weeds on the upper side to impede sight lines. It will be a maintenance issue

Rich Harrington said they can put a swale on the upper side to bring runoff around the road.

Mike Clayton noted that the existing drop inlet in Acton gets overwhelmed and you will be putting more water in that area. Rich Harrington said there should not be any more water than for existing conditions. He thought about providing oversized pipes in the bottom. They did that at the Acton Town Hall to get storage. He will also look into super elevating around curves. Sue Sullivan said if you super elevate, there will be a concern about snowmelt because of shaded areas.

Sue Sullivan asked if there is existing groundwater breakout. She doesn't want an issue like we had at Brandy Meade Circle.

Mike Clayton said everything has a priority when sanding and West Acton Road would take priority over this proposed road. He said if it is a private way, the Highway Department will most likely be sanding it anyway. They will still get calls and won't have funds to maintain the road.

Rich Harrington suggested they could pitch the shoulders away from the road. Mike Clayton said that would help.

It was noted that they would need guardrails and vertical curbs for sidewalks. Laura Spear said that the Planning Board often waives sidewalks. In this case, because the grade is so steep, sidewalks would be necessary.

Those present discussed why it would be a problem if it remained a private way. Mike McLaughlin said a majority of private ways are never maintained as well as public ways and they have a responsibility to respond to an emergency call. They wouldn't be able to call the Highway Department in advance to see if it had been plowed.

Sue Sullivan said there doesn't appear to be enough room on West Acton Road to address the slope. Birch Hill Road has a 14% slope but it also has a leveling area.

Rich Harrington said they presented two concepts (Conventional Subdivision and PCD), both of which have 10% grades. He said they could consider reducing shoulders and dropping grade. Laura Spear said it would be helpful to have sight-line information. It was noted they could use low growth vegetation. Mike Clayton said snow banks in the winter will also be a problem. Sue Sullivan said they may need to prove they can do a conventional subdivision in terms of grades. Rich Harrington said they haven't done that in the past but will look at it. Sue Sullivan agreed that they haven't done it in the past but noted this is a unique site in terms of grades.

Rich Harrington thinks everyone agrees that they don't want to reduce pavement width at the curve and sidewalks should be provided on the inside. He said that 8% grades will impact the wetlands. He will look at:

- shifting the pavement some,
- removing the grass shoulder and using vertical curbs to condense the width of right of way at the wetlands crossing, and
- pitch shoulders away to address snow melt.

Laura Spear questioned how sanding would effect wetlands. Rich Harrington said they will provide for sediment forebays.

Sue Sullivan asked Mike Clayton if he would prefer vertical curbs on both sides. Mike said it would be an obstacle for plowing but they could deal with it.

Chief Trefry said sufficient area should be provided for school children at bottom of the hill. Rich Harrington said there will be room for 3 to 4 cars. Laura noted there are 24 homes. Ernie Dodd noted that at Pilot Grove, the parents drive the children to the bottom of the hill. Chief Trefry said a pull off area should be provided. He said the school bus won't want to go up the hill. Rich Harrington said they can open up the pavement in that area. Chief Trefry suggested a spot at the bottom of hill, in case people can't get up the hill in winter.

Kathleen Willis said they need to provide clearance for people waiting. They also need to provide for emergency response. Sue questioned if the emergency departments automatically

call the Highway Depart to see if the road was plowed and sanded. Chief McLaughlin responded yes, they are always aware if the road is plowed.

Laura Spear said she is hearing a strong message that access needs to be from West Acton Road. Rich Harrington said they might be able to provide a limited access to Acton in the winter. Chief McLaughlin said the emergency access, shown on the plan, looks too narrow. He also noted that he is not big on gated accesses.

Sue Sullivan asked Mike Clayton if he would need an emergency access. Mike said it is up to the Police and Fire departments. If they need it, the Highway Department would have to plow it.

Sergeant Lima said this is an 18-lot subdivision. Statistically, he can't predict how many responses will be required but assumes there will not be many. They are up on Pilot Grove Hill all the time and haven't had a problem with the grades. If they have to go up there, they will get there. They have chains for the fire trucks. He hates to think about statistics, but compared to Pilot Grove Hill, they don't have trouble getting there.

Chief McLaughlin said if the access were wide enough, it should be okay.

Rich Harrington said he will take back comments and have an additional sketch to discuss things further. He doesn't anticipate wrapping up the meeting tomorrow night. He thinks it is more important to get it right.

Rich Harrington reviewed plans he prepared, looking at other approaches from West Acton Road, which didn't appear to be feasible.

Sue Sullivan said they need to pay attention to the grades for the Acton access to the site. Chief McLaughlin said he is not sure that Acton would respond any faster than Stow. It is about the same distance.

Rich Harrington will meet with Chief McLaughlin to determine locations for fire cisterns. Chief McLaughlin said they are looking at two cisterns, based on original configuration.

Kathleen Willis noted that, with other subdivisions, the Board required a transition so the entrance would have no increase in grade for a certain distance. She asked if that is something the Board should consider in this instance. Sue Sullivan said some regulations are based on the category of road. Mike Clayton said it would be helpful if there were a flat area coming from the 5% to 10% grade. The Planning Board will work with public safety departments on an appropriate transition

The meeting adjourned at 10:30 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Kelleher
Planning Coordinator