

**TOWN OF STOW
PLANNING BOARD**

Minutes of the March 8, 2011 Planning Board Meeting.

Present: Planning Board Members: Leonard Golder, Steve Quinn, Lori Clark, Kathleen Willis and Ernest Dodd
Associate Member: Brian Martinson
Planning Coordinator: Karen Kelleher
Administrative Assistant: Kristen Domurad

The Meeting was called to order at 7 P.M.

DISCUSSION/ACTION ITEMS

Meeting with John Morgan and Kenny Caputo of Coler and Colantonio.

Planning Board Members and Staff introduced themselves to John Morgan who will be taking over project design and survey work from Kenny Caputo.

Kenny explained that he would continue to assist John Morgan and the Town with their engineering project on a contract basis through Coler and Colantonio.

John Morgan has worked for Coler and Colantonio for over 15 years and is the Transportation Engineering Manager at their firm.

Karen stated that Coler and Colantonio had finished the existing conditions survey work, which was shown on the wall.

Kenny Caputo stated that they would be sending a letter to Karen Kelleher to look over and then send to Mass Highway. They indicated that the Town's initial request for Chapter 90 funds seemed as though it was for planning and not for engineering design project. Kenny stated that this letter would describe that the Town is asking for design funds.

John stated that the Town could also apply for funds through the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) or Public Works Economic Development (PWED) grant.

He noted that there are circumstances where the town does not want to be fully regulated by Mass Highway standards so they only use Chapter 90 funds for certain components of the project.

Kenny stated that both the PWED and TIP programs would want estimates for the project improvement.

Lenny Golder asked if there were matching requirements with any these programs.

Kenny stated that the only requirements are to pay for design cost, but if there are right of ways involved the town would be responsible for securing them on their own.

He stated that it would take a number of years to get the project funding and construction in place.

Kenny noted that you do not have to reapply every year to the TIP, once you are on the list you stay on the list until your project is funded. He stated that the TIP is in the middle of its funding year, which begins in October/September.

He noted that with TIP there is a State/Federal match but this does not get passed down to the towns.

He stated that the Town might need to lobby to get their project on the list if it is not well recognized, but that with the community behind this project and making public participation a key component they could be a strong candidate for a PWED grant. Kenny noted that most towns prefer the PWED grant because the towns have control over the design.

He also noted that the town could qualify for Small Town Rural Assistance Program (STRAP) funds as well.

Kenny said that the letter to Mass Highway requesting Chapter 90 funds should result in funding for the second Phase. If not approved by Mass Highway, he recommended having local officials make some calls to point out how this project does qualify for these funds.

Steve stated that the Planning Board had invited Coler and Colantonio representatives John and Kenny and property owners in the Lower Village Business District to their meeting to get an understanding of the residents desire for the Lower Village Business District. He explained again why the Board had hired Coler and Colantonio and that they hope to identify constraints and opportunities to create a safe pedestrian oriented business village.

Steve noted that the Board and Coler and Colantonio are working to put together a multiphase plan that will accomplish that.

Karen stated that Coler and Colantonio would be looking into past Lower Village studies done of the Lower Village Business District, such as the Fay Spoffard and Thorndike Traffic Study, to help identify traffic circulation alternatives.

Kenny stated that the PWED grant program encourages towns to put money into the project but is not required. However, he noted that if towns don't put up at least 20% their project is not likely to float to the top of the list.

Kenny recommended that the Board go through the formal steps for a PWED grant; hold an open public meeting on the project, have a project manager appointed by the Selectmen and Planning Board and make sure that the project is something that the Town can handle. He stated that with PWED grants you could do parts of the project piece by piece.

Kenny said that one category is job creation and that this will make the town a viable candidate for the project.

Lenny asked if the construction aspect of the project could be related to job creation. Kenny said that towns have tied that into their category of job creation.

He said that if the Town were to do a streetscape and sidewalk plan along the south side of Route 117 this could attract new tenants into vacant spaces and help to redevelop or develop properties.

Lenny stated, one issue that came up last week was the question of using granite curbing for sidewalks as Mass Highway guidelines suggest.

Kenny noted that vertical granite curbing is not required if you have a berm or strip of grass separating the walkway and street.

Karen stated that Mass Highway's guidelines state that granite curbing is necessary along certain roads with little or no setbacks and high speeds.

Lenny stated that some people don't like the idea of granite curbing because it does not look rural.

Steve and Lori noted the main concern was the cost of granite curbing.

Kenny stated that the TIP program would require both sides of the road to have vertical granite curbing, which is not necessarily what the Town may want.

Kenny stated that towns use vertical granite curbing because there is no offset from the road, but if there is a lot of room for a setback with a grass strip then building a sidewalk without vertical granite is okay.

He noted that vertical granite curbing is much more maintainable, more sustainable and holds up the material behind it much better. He stated that on a road like Rt. 117 you don't want cars driving up on the grass berm because you will end up with a gravel strip.

Don McPherson, member of the Lower Village stated, other than aesthetics the input from the Fire Department was that they would be worried about emergency vehicles not being able to drive over the vertical granite curb.

APPOINTMENTS

Lower Village Planning with Lower Village Property Owners

Steve Quinn thanked all property owners and residents who were at the meeting. The Board introduced themselves.

Rich Presti, property owner of 124 Great Road, stated that the biggest problem in Lower Village is the lack of water. He stated that, Stepping Stones, and several other businesses in the Lower Village could end up being shut down if water is not brought to Lower Village.

Gordon Whitman, property manager of Linear Retail (Stow Shopping Center) stated that their property is in conformance has plenty of water and is in conformance with all water laws. It was noted that Meeting House and the gymnastics business is also in compliance.

Resident Daisy Dearborn stated that the problem is locating the septic. She stated that if the town could just get water into the lower village the problem would be solved

Ernie Dodd stated that the Town has approved the use of Deerfield Lane Open Space parcel for use of a public well site, but are now awaiting approval from the State. He noted that either Plantation Apartments/Pilot Grove Apartments or property owners in Lower Village would have to maintain the well.

Karen Kelleher stated that the Board of Selectmen have stated that they are willing to provide land for a well site but that there is no interest in running a municipal water service. She noted that the Town has been actively trying to find a solution for water and had been in contact with the Town of Maynard for shared services, but this effort has not been successful. Karen also noted that the Planning Board has applied to Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) technical assistance grant with a focus on assistance in obtaining a water supply for the Lower Village area.

Planning Board members noted that south side of the street is mostly in need of water.

Steve Quinn stated that the Planning Board had hoped to discuss current opportunities and constraints in the Lower Village and how they could help. He noted that they are working under the premise that water will be coming to Lower Village, He said the Board wants to be prepared for potential development once a water supply is available so that development is done in a manner consistent with our goals.

Steve said the board would like to hear input on zoning issues such as different frontage requirements, setbacks, parking, signage, etc.

Resident Leigh Hildebrandt of 196 Great Road stated she was very concerned about a roundabout going in front of her house.

Planning Board members explained to her that they had hired Coler and Colantonio to review the past studies, including the study conducted by FST, which recommended an alternative for two roundabouts. They noted that roundabouts may not even be the answer to the traffic issue and may not fit after evaluating the existing conditions survey.

Steve Quinn stated the Board is looking to create a step-by-step plan so that things are done in sequence to achieve the overall goal.

Lori Clark stated that the first study done by FST was not based on existing conditions plans, it was more of a conceptual plan. She noted that now we have an existing conditions plan to see what opportunities are available.

Kenny Caputo explained that the existing conditions plan defines the right of way, which will allow the Board to make concept plans into reality and determine if they would even work.

Steve Quinn stated that the final plan may or may not include a roundabout. He said the plan they are hoping to create will make the Lower Village more attractive, more pedestrian friendly for when the economy improves and water is brought to Lower Village. He stated that with the current zoning we could get more of the same types of development, but with changes in policy we could allow future development in keeping with our goals.

Resident Daisy Dearborn of Meeting House stated that several of her friends and she walk all the time and that pedestrian access is very important to them. She stated that there are several things the Town could do right now to improve the Lower Village;

- Clear the four dead trees off town property on Samuel Prescott Drive, bittersweet and the poison ivy
- Clean up the trash, especially bottles and cans in the same location

Daisy also stated that if the Planning Board wants to make the Lower Village a business oriented district that brings in money, they cannot keep throwing silly laws in front of the owners. She stated that the Board needs to treat the businesses better and stop being so picky as they had been with the used car lot and the flags. She stated that she likes the flags.

Daisy also noted that the Stow Shopping Center sign needs to be fixed and that they should make their mind up and fix it. She said that naming the business district the Lower Village might not be the best name because people think it will remain a small village.

Ernie Dodd stated that the uses in the Zoning Bylaw are what the Town decided on and that things may need to be changed.

Karen Kelleher asked for recommendations on what changes could help make the area more business friendly.

Ernie Dodd asked if there was anything with the sign bylaw.

Property owner Rich Presti stated that the sign bylaw and the lighting bylaw should be revisited. He stated that there should be some type of middle ground on lighting that is agreeable to businesses and property owners. He stated that businesses would like to have some lights on after dark so they have visibility.

Resident Leigh Hilderbrant stated that she lives right next to the Stow House of Pizza and that the lights don't bother her at all. She stated that what does bother are the noises that come from the building's parking lot after hours.

Kenny Caputo stated that studies indicate lighting does attract groups and can create an unwanted gathering place.

Gordon Whitman, property manager of Stow Shopping Center, stated that the lighting bylaw in the Town makes it very difficult for visibility for businesses, such as the shopping center, that are set back from the road.

Both Rich Presti and Gordon Whitman suggested allowing some lighting after hours so that businesses have more visibility.

Rich Presti also noted that eliminating setbacks would allow for more opportunities. He said that sidewalks work best when you are next to the businesses and can walk down and see stores next to you. He stated that if he lived in Stow he would be annoyed to always having to drive to a surrounding town every time he wanted something.

Gordon Whitman stated that the Town has a high demand for number of parking spaces and because of this their property is setback far from the road.

Kenny Caputo asked Gordon if they would be able to live with less parking. Gordon stated that the amount of parking he has now is right for the Town, as it has grown.

Rich Presti said that a mix of stores that operate at different times could share parking. He also noted that building heights could be revisited. He said that current zoning makes it difficult to do anything easily. Rich said that revisiting the height; width, parking ratio and accelerating the permitting process would encourage growth.

Lenny Golder said that the Board will have to do a cost/benefit analysis for everything and asked if design guidelines such as a colonial look would be difficult for businesses.

Mr. Presti stated that it's walking a thin line when you tell businesses how they have to look.

Kathleen Willis stated that there have been several surveys and input from the Master Plan on visioning for Lower Village that state residents would like a village concept. She noted that this type of development has been gaining energy not only in New England towns but throughout the country. Kathleen stated that considering design guidelines for more traditional structures instead of modern ones would help in trying to maintain the Town's rural character.

Resident Nancy Aresenault, 267 Red Acre Road and Co-Owner of the Stow Independent asked how realistic it would be to incorporate changes as most of the properties are already developed.

Kenny Caputo stated that design guidelines can be written in a flexible way and can set the tone for what the image of the Town is. He noted that tenants often want character, which makes their business more viable. Kenny said that a large modern Lexis dealership (like in Walpole, MA) would not fit in Lower Village, it would stick out.

Linda Hathaway stated that the Planning Board might need to change some of the Zoning Bylaws. She stated that some sign bylaws are restrictive such as the bylaw about temporary signs. She stated that the only way Curves can be seen is by using temporary signs because the main sign is hidden and the building cannot be seen from the roadway.

Brian Martinson stated that the Community Chest uses a tent style temporary signs that the bylaw allows for.

Linda stated that that sign is allowed on the common because it is a non-profit.

Ernie Dodd stated that the Board recognizes they need to revisit the sign bylaw.

Leigh Hilderbrant stated that the Curves plaza is so dangerous to exit because the fencing is in the line of site.

Lori Clark stated that the south side of the Lower Village is not walkable due to the lack of sidewalks, and landscaping is close to the road.

Lenny Golder stated that there are a lot of access roads into different properties and asked if there could be a possibility to merge some of the entrances. (ie. Interlot connections)

Mr. Presti stated that it would depend on the property owner's relationships with one another.

Kenny Caputo stated that if the Town provides incentives into bylaws or policies to encourage interlot connections and for parking lots to be linked, the property owners would be more likely to work together. He said this could really help with traffic calming and would help the businesses.

He also noted that the town should also consider allowing for smaller lots. This could help owners sell off their land into smaller pieces.

Nancy Aresenault stated that there is a lot of vacant space; Steinburg's property, the Beef and Ale and asked how the Town can help get businesses into these spaces.

Karen Kelleher stated that the Planning Board has had discussions with the Board of Selectmen to create an economic development committee, who could work with businesses and property owners.

Kenny Caputo asked if the Town is a member of the local Chamber of Commerce.

Karen stated that the Town does have a Business Association, which has not been very active.

Resident Don McPherson stated that Acton has an active Business Association.

Mr. Presti stated that he is a member of the West Acton Business Association and that they hold a Fall Fest every year. He stated that Lower Village in Stow seems to lack a sense of character and a sense of community.

Brian Martinson said that the Town could possibly help facilitate businesses to work with the business association.

Karen Kelleher stated that the Lower Village Committee had tried to get an event together in the Lower Village and had a hard time getting business and property owners together.

Linda Hathaway asked if there was any part of SpringFest that could be brought down to the Lower Village area.

Leigh Hilderbrant suggested a shuttle for people to park their cars in the Lower Village and shuttle up to the fields.

Lori Clark suggested getting Lower Village businesses involved in SpringFest.

Karen noted that several businesses have participated in SpringFest.

Karen asked if either Rich Presti or Gordon Whitman were a member of the Stow Business Association.

Both were not.

Daisy Dearborn suggested having a farmers market or a fall fest in Lower Village.

Lenny Golder stated that the Board should extend invitations to property owners for future meetings.

Kathleen stated that the Board should commit to meet quarterly to follow up.

Steve stated that it will be helpful to have more meetings to focus on certain topics sooner rather than later.

Rich Presti stated that the Board should identify other Towns that have done a good job designing their bylaws and downtown.

Ernie Dodd asked the business property owners if they would be interested in a mixed-use bylaw.

Rich stated that he would be in favor of it as long as a residential component was not mandated.

The Board thanked all the residents and property owners in the Lower Village for attending the meeting and providing input.

Karen Kelleher asked resident Mark Whitehead, former Lincoln Town Planner about his experience with mixed use development in Lincoln.

Mark stated that they had had a mixed-use development with a shopping center and apartments. Steve and Ernie both noted that Lincoln has a train station.

Karen asked Mark if he had any visions for Lower Village.

Mark said he had mixed feelings about a roundabout.

Kathleen stated that Coler and Colantonio would be evaluating the options for the traffic mitigation in the area.

Karen noted that the Board told Coler and Colantonio that they should not limit their evaluation to roundabouts but should evaluate all of the recommendations in the Fay, Spofford and Thorndike traffic report

Board members asked if Mark Whitehead would be interested in becoming an associate member of the Planning Board. He said he would be and would write a letter of interest.

ACTION/DISCUSSION ITEMS

Stow Community Park Modification to Special Permit

The Board reviewed the draft decision and made some comments.

Kathleen stated that the Light Pollution Study Sub-Committee should look at the lights and give recommendations.

Karen will revise the draft for the Planning Board's next meeting and incorporate suggestions.

Solar Farms

Karen reported that she has been reviewing other town solar bylaws and asked the Board for further direction in drafting a bylaw for Stow, as there is no standard as to where the use is allowed. Some towns have overlay district, some limit the use to industrial districts and some are allowed in all district. There doesn't seem to be any standard as to the level of permitting either. Some are allowed by-right with Site Plan Approval and some by Special Permit. Most towns require the same setbacks as in the zoning district in which the solar facility would be located and some required a greater setback when abutting a residential property.

Members agreed that the use should be allowed in all districts, subject to special permit and site plan review.

Karen stated that the Town should look into finding a site for a solar farm on town property to bring in revenue.

COORDINATOR'S REPORT

Karen Kelleher updated the Board of the ongoing activities in the Planning Department.

Highgrove Estates

Karen reported on the meeting with Steve, Ernie, Rich Harrington, Pat Perry and the Fire Chief. The Fire Department requested a cistern in the cul-de-sac and that it be maintained and plowed for access, as well as clearing the sides of the roads. Rich Harrington agreed to this.

Conservation and Rich agreed to a do not disturb easement area between the homes open space.

Rich Harrington also stated that they would be willing to put some investment into the existing drainage at the bottom of the hill.

Karen will be coordinating a meeting with Mike Clayton.

She also noted that the Fire Department requested the street numbering be done consecutively as some homes are proposed to be set back from the road—Rich agreed to this.

Walkways

Karen stated that she is still receiving emails in regards to walkways, most are just supporting walkways in general.

Star Tower/T-Mobile

Karen reported that the Cell Tower decision had been appealed and that they met the filing requirements under the federal laws, which does not require them to submit a filing with the Town Clerk.

Linear Retail Sign

Karen Kelleher reported that they had received a new proposal for a sign at the Stow Shopping Center.

The Board agreed to review the new proposal for next weeks meeting.

Lori noted that they added LED lighting to the sign.

Kathleen stated that the sign is still too big and thinks they should stick with what they had told Linear Retail before, that they would be willing to support a variance to the bylaw if they have one smaller sign.

Kathleen and Brian stated that they felt some of the viewpoints and comments made by the businessmen were of concern.

Brian indicated that he doesn't believe any of Stow's bylaws are anti-business.

Kathleen stated that if the businesses abided by the lighting bylaws it wouldn't be a mess.

Lenny stated that he thought they brought up other important issues besides lighting and signage such as heights and setbacks.

Lori Clark asked who clears out the paths on the Town property and suggested it be done more often than once a year, as this is not enough to keep the path passable.

Kathleen Willis motioned to enter into executive session for the purpose of discussing on going litigation concerning Meadowbrook Estates and Star Tower/T-Mobile and to adjourn at the conclusion. The motion was carried by a unanimous roll call vote (Kathleen Willis, Steve Quinn, Lenny Golder, Lori Clark and Ernie Dodd).

The meeting was adjourned at 10:10 PM

Respectfully Submitted,

Kristen Domurad
Administrative Assistant