

TOWN OF STOW PLANNING BOARD

Minutes of the January 10, 2012 Planning Board Meeting.

Present: Planning Board Members: Steve Quinn, Kathleen Willis, Ernest Dodd, Lori Clark,
and Lenny Golder
Voting Associate Member: Brian Martinson
Associate Member: Martha Monroe
Planning Coordinator: Karen Kelleher
Administrative Assistant: Kristen Domurad-Guichard

Called to order at 7PM.

REVIEW OF CORRESPONDENCE AND MINUTES

Minutes

Kathleen Willis moved to approve the minutes of the January 10, 2012 Planning Board meeting as amended. The motion was seconded by Ernie Dodd and carried by a vote of four in favor (Ernie Dodd, Steve Quinn, Kathleen Willis and Lori Clark).

Correspondence

Email from Dave Coia RE: Massachusetts General Law (MGL) Surveyors Rights
Members questioned why the MGL excerpt is included in their packet. Karen explained that Dave Coia, of Habitech had their attorney send her the chapter of MGL, which explains surveyor's rights and asked her to include it into the letter to the homeowners of Sylvan Drive.

PUBLIC INPUT

No public input at this time.

PLANNING BOARD MEMBERS' UPDATES

Elementary School Building Committee (ESBC)

Steve Quinn stated that the school district will be fully moved in until January 30, 2012. They have decided to move the classrooms in until that section is complete.

COORDINATOR'S REPORT

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

Sylvan Drive Street Trees

Karen reported that she talked to Dave Coia of Habitech who stated he was instructed by Bruce Wheeler to send an email out to the residents of Sylvan Drive asking if they want a tree on their property/in front of their property, what type of tree, and where. Karen said it did not seem like Habitech plans on meeting with the residents. She asked the Board if they wanted her to suggest meeting space in the Town Building.

Lori stated that she thought it might be more expedient for all parties to get together to discuss the situation.

Ernie stated that he did not think the town needed to act as mediators.

The Board asked Karen to notify the residents of Sylvan Drive that the Board plans on meeting with Habitech next week to follow up on their last discussion, and to offer a meeting space for them to review the plan.

Collings Site Walk

Karen asked the Board when they could meet for a site walk on the Collings property to view the former Parmeter property.

The Board agreed to meet at the Collings property driveway entrance on Sunday at 11:15AM. Karen will contact Mr. Collings.

Planning Board Vacancy

Karen stated that the Planning Board Vacancy notice was posted. She received a letter of interest from Brian Martinson but hadn't heard from anyone else.

Karen will send a copy to Martha Monroe.

Karen explained that once the January 31, 2012 deadline arrives the Board of Selectmen and Planning Board will need to get together to make the appointment. She will be in contact with Laura Spear to schedule a meeting.

Minuteman Area Group on Interlocal Coordination (MAGIC): Small Town Rural Economic Development Workshop

Karen reported on the workshop she and Kristen attended. They learned of creative economy techniques and ideas some rural towns are using to boost their local economies. It was mostly focused on tourism and cultural uses.

Transportation Initiative Program

Karen stated that she and Kristen would be attending a TIP workshop this Thursday to learn more about the application and approval process of TIP projects.

Appreciation Dinner for Kathleen

The Board will plan a dinner for Kathleen and Russ Willis for the first Wednesday of March around 6:30PM to thank them for their dedication to the town, as they will be moving to California.

Correspondence from Hudson Public Works Department

Karen reported that Hudson is working on their annual water withdraw permit and are required to comply with best efforts requirements as outlined in their Water Withdrawal Permit when the Zone II extends into abutting towns. A portion falls within Stow, specifically around the Gleasondale Mill and White Pond. Board members noted this area of town needs assistance with sewer and this may provide an opportunity to swap water for sewer.

APPOINTMENTS

Mark and Beth Gagnon, Mistletoe Farm

Karen explained that Mark and Beth were looking to build a new house on the Mistletoe Farm property. She informed them that no more than one dwelling on a property is allowed, but since the existing farmhouse is an historic structure, the historic preservation section of the Zoning Bylaw may allow for alternative uses. Mark and Beth also indicated to her they might be

interested in using the farmhouse for a small gift shop to go along with their tree farm business or possibly an accessory apartment.

The Board had suggested Mark and Beth share their ideas with the Planning Board.

Karen noted that the Building Commissioner indicated he would not be able to issue a building permit until and unless a special permit was issued specifying the alternative use of the existing farmhouse.

Mark stated that they want to maintain the farmhouse building, but would like to build a house on the hill in the back of their property. He stated that they plan to be there a long time with their four children.

Mark said they are thinking of using the existing farmhouse as a seasonal shop during the apple season and also during Christmas when they sell their trees. They also thought about having an accessory apartment where their family could stay while visiting over long periods of time.

Mark asked if Board members knew how this would impact their taxes.

The Board said they were unsure.

Karen asked Mark if there was a way to divide the farmhouse so that 700sqft were kept for the accessory apartment.

Mark said they would be able to do this. He noted that part of the farmhouse was never finished. A section was historically used to house the field workers and does not have heat or plumbing.

Ernie asked if they would be applying for two special permits, one for an accessory apartment and one for mix use for the store.

Karen suggested one special permit be applied for, for the entire project under the section of the bylaw that allows uses not otherwise allowed under the Bylaw for historic buildings.

The Board felt that the historic preservation bylaw would be a good tool to protect the old farmhouse.

Karen advised them she could help them with the application process once they have finalized their plans.

DISCUSSION/ACTION ITEMS

Discuss Proposal from Collings RE: Riverhill Estates

The Board discussed the proposal presented by Mr. Collings to grant a public access easement on a portion of the former Parmenter property, a .5 acre parcel located along the Assabet River, in exchange for rezoning a portion of lot 5 as proposed on the Riverview Estates Subdivision from Recreation-Conservation to Residential.

Ernie Dodd read the intent of the Floodplain/Wetlands Overlay District and Recreation-Conservation District as stated in the Zoning Bylaw:

The Flood Plain/Wetlands District is intended to protect the public health and safety, persons and property against the hazards of flood water inundation; to preserve and maintain the GROUND WATER table; to protect the community from the costs which may be incurred when unsuitable development occurs in swamps, marshes, along water courses, or in areas subject to floods; and to conserve natural conditions, wildlife, and OPEN SPACES for the education, recreation and general welfare of the public. The provisions applicable to the Flood

Plain/Wetlands District shall be considered as overlapping other zoning districts. In those cases where the Flood Plain/Wetlands District overlaps another zoning district, the provisions of the Flood Plain/Wetlands District shall be controlling.

The Recreation-Conservation District is intended to protect the public health and safety, to protect persons and property against hazards of flood water inundation and unsuitable and unhealthy development of unsuitable soils, wetlands, marsh land and water courses; to protect the balance of nature, including the habitat for birds, wildlife, and plants essential to the survival of man; to conserve and increase the amenities of the Town, natural conditions and OPEN SPACES for education, recreation, agriculture, and the general welfare.

The Board determined that it is not in the Town's best interest to support Mr. Colling's proposal as the rezoning this property as it would be in derogation of the intent and purpose of the purposes of the Zoning Bylaw.

Ernie noted that there is buildable, residentially zoned land within lot 5, so the house does not need to be located within these districts.

Steve Quinn noted that it has been the Board's policy not to propose/support zoning map amendments for individual property owners.

After this discussion the Board felt it would be unnecessary to conduct a site walk of the former Parmeter property.

Karen will draft a letter to send to Mr. Collings explaining the Board's position.

APPOINTMENTS Continued...

John Morgan of Coler and Colantonio

Lower Village Traffic Planning

Karen informed the Board she sent John the list of questions the Board had raised at their last meeting in regard to the 5 traffic concepts presented by John.

Kathleen noted the Board was most interested in the ellipse roundabout concept and Concept 5, which encroaches onto the Presti property.

Lori Clark asked John if they would have suggested roundabout options if Coler and Colantonio had not provided with the original FST.

John said they probably would have dug into the traffic counts and done more analysis in the beginning themselves, which FST had done, and run analysis options. He stated that the location is very difficult due to the geometry and level of through traffic. John said that they did look into signal options, but there would be no way to queue the backed up cars without two lanes in both directions.

He noted that they did have some concerns about the roundabout option as well because it will lead to a delay on Great Road during peak hours, which the previous study did indicate. This delay slightly exceeds what is recommended for a single lane roundabout.

John said that the software is saying the queue on Great Road will be up to 3,000 ft. He noted it would be difficult to get MassDot /TIP funding for a project with this queue but it shouldn't be an issue in obtaining funding from MassWorks.

John said he also did a quick signal light study at the shopping center but this would require two signal lanes and there is not enough room for this.

John suggested the Board might want to use traffic calming devices and minor improvements such as formalizing a left turn lane at Pompositticut St.; adding a small median strip, creating an island for the approach into Lower Village; and extending the sidewalk down the north side of Rt. 117 past the graveyard to indicate to cars that a village is approaching. John also noted that pedestrian improvements and granite curbing would also slow cars down making it more of a village feel. Street trees are also helpful.

Brian Martinson said that the issues are really for people trying to turn left out of Pompositticut Street. He said those minor improvements would not alleviate the problems for Pompositticut St. John stated that they would not address the difficulty getting out of Red Acre Road or Pompositticut Street or the shopping center, but no matter what options the Board chooses, all the problems will not be alleviated.

Steve Quinn questioned if the Board should recommend a costly major makeover that would solve all the problems, or if we should focus on the minor, less costly, improvements as recommended by John, which will accomplish some of the goals.

Martha Monroe reiterated Steve's comments.

Lori noted that residents who are already against a roundabout would not be happy to hear that it would create a greater backup.

John noted the minor improvements, would slow traffic down and make drivers more likely to let people turn out of Pompositticut and Red Acre Road.

Kathleen asked if there were other traffic calming devices John might suggest.

John also suggested rumble strips and textured crosswalks.

John suggested pedestrian lampposts.

Kathleen and Lori stated that the Board was not interested in any additional lighting in Lower Village.

John noted a lot of town centers do have lampposts in their business/commercial areas.

Lori noted that inter-lot connections would help to consolidate curb cuts.

Kathleen asked John how the traffic would back up with the roundabout, as it was her impression that cars would constantly be moving.

John explained that the software allows them to anticipate the level of queues with various roadway designs.

Martha Monroe asked if there was a capacity calculation before the Board asked for the roundabout engineering.

Lori explained that the Board originally had a study conducted by FST, which investigated alternatives that would ease traffic and evaluated roundabouts vs. traffic lights. Brian stated they also prioritized what was most important.

Lori stated that the FST study resulted in a roundabout being the preferred method that best meets most of their goals. She noted that the FST study did not incorporate an existing conditions plan so they were unable to see how the roundabout would fit on the ground.

John stated that another alternative is a multi lane roundabout, which he thought would complicate driving and would require a major taking.

Steve said he felt the traffic calming devices John suggested would drastically change the look of the area, slow traffic down and allow people from Red Acre Road and Pompositticut to turn out. Steve asked John for an approximate cost of the roundabout. John stated it would most likely be around a few hundred thousand dollars.

Martha asked how many accidents have been in that area over the last few years. Board members did not know.

Kathleen stated that she would consider the roundabout because it would make turning much safer and meet most of their goals.

Lori stated that the Board would need to make sure to clearly communicate the pros and cons of each option.

Kathleen asked John what were some tools to gain the publics input. Brian stated that he did not feel there was more to be said as he did not feel they would be able to get any more input than they did at their past public meetings on the subject.

Karen noted that it would be important to hold public hearings again as the public meetings on the Lower Village traffic issues were conducted several years ago.

Brian agreed that the Board should be prepared to answer every question that might be raised.

Brian stated that the roundabout solution would solve a lot of problems, the only disadvantage would be commuter hours people would have to wait a little longer like in most places, possibly 7-8 minutes longer.
[Lenny Golder arrived at this point in the meeting.]

Karen stated that one of the major goals was to accommodate through traffic. John stated that the wait on Great Road would increase by 4 minutes but continuously move, but the wait for the other three approaches would decrease. John stated that the current service grade is an F, and it would be improved at the other three turn approaches.

Lenny asked what the grades would be if a signal was installed.

John stated that the signal light at the shopping center would result in a Level of Service of “D” and the west bound in the afternoon would result in a Level of Service of “F”. John stated that multiple lanes would be necessary to accommodate any signal lights.

Ernie asked about putting a light at White Pond Road. Members didn’t think this would be feasible.

John stated, during a peak hour there are only about 8 people turning left out of Pompositticut St. Brian stated that he suspected the reason so few left turns were made was because it is dangerous and people tend to turn right and change direction in a parking lot to go east on Route 117.

Lenny asked how many cars turn left out of Red Acre Road in a peak hour.

John stated the study indicated 30-40.

Pompositticut right hand turns have about 350 at peak hour.

Steve asked John if he could provide the Board with the pros and cons, with the wait times and Level of Service grades he discussed tonight.

John said he could put together a summary.

Karen asked the Board if they had any questions about the elongated roundabout.

Lori asked John what his opinion was, as it seemed to be buildable but unproven for effectiveness.

John stated he did further research and found that there aren’t any in the area, but studies have shown they can be fairly similar in function to the roundabout as long as they are small and speeds are low, but noted the Pompositticut leg would back up more than it currently does.

Lori stated that the Board would like to get the information on pros and cons from John so they can finish the comparison chart they had started.

Steve also requested obtaining generic cost estimates.

John said he could come up with those as well.

Lenny asked for him to also do a comparison with the lights.

Lori stated that the Board had decided not to include the lights because it did not address any of the other issues on Rt. 117 or the other entrances into the Lower Village.

Steve noted the Board is not looking to solely help the shopping center.

Martha noted that the Board should obtain data to determine that the safety issue is not just a perceived problem. She said that the economy is bad right now and should evaluate if its worth spending money. She noted the Board’s previous issue was traffic and now they are more concerned with safety.

Lori stated that the real question is what will happen if the Town does nothing, and how will the area look in x number of years.

Karen noted the Board had identified several goals for the Lower Village: safety, destination traffic, through traffic, pedestrian mobility, etc.

Brian stated that he knows there are accidents in that area because he hears them and was in one just last year. He said there are also a lot of near misses.

Lenny stated there are a lot of near misses in roundabouts.

Martha stated that she drives through the one in Concord and there are more near misses there than at any stop light.

John Morgan noted that the one she was referring to in Concord was a rotary, which works very differently than a roundabout.

Lenny stated the only difference was that they were smaller.

John stated that roundabouts have been studied extensively and if there are accidents they are much less severe than at signal intersections. Roundabout accidents result in minor property damage, while accidents at signal intersections often result in bodily harm.

Lenny said that cars are doing the same thing in a roundabout as they do in a rotary.

John explained that you could go faster in a rotary than you can in a roundabout because the circle is smaller.

Karen also noted that the approach is also slower.

A resident asked how trucks maneuver around the roundabout.

John pointed to the area closer to the center that could be made of brick or stone, which allows trucks to drive over.

John stated that they could take a more in-depth look at safety if the Board wanted and do a cost benefit analysis. But he did not have traffic information for Red Acre Road or Pompositticut.

Kathleen said the Board could obtain that information from the Police Department.

Lori also asked if John could also evaluate what would happen if nothing were done.

John said his assumption would be that the volume would increase, delays would get longer coming out of the side streets and there would be shorter gaps so more near misses.

Karen asked the Board if they had had the next steps for John.

The Board directed John to compile factual data for:

- Elongated Roundabout

- Roundabout – Concept 5 requiring the small property taking

- Alternative options (Including sidewalks, street trees, medians, turn lane at Pompositticut)

- A “do nothing” approach

John requested updated accident information from the Police Department.

Ernie Dodd asked if a westbound only stop light would help.

John stated that this would not fix the problem in the morning going east and would not solve the other issues the Planning Board has.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:26PM

Respectfully Submitted,
Kristen Domurad-Guichard