

STURBRIDGE PLANNING BOARD
MINUTES OF
WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2006

On a roll call made by Ms. Morrison, Clerk the following members were present:

Present: Tom Creamer, Chair
Russell Chamberland
James Cunniff
Penny Dumas
Jennifer Morrison, Clerk
Sandra Gibson-Quigley
Bruce Smith

Also Present: Jean Bubon, Town Planner

A Special meeting of the Planning Board was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Chairman, Tom Creamer. The sole purpose of the meeting was to continue discussion and review of proposed zoning amendments submitted by the Zoning Study Committee.

On behalf of the Board Ms. Morrison expressed sincere condolences to the family and friends of Donald Mappleback.

**PLANNING BOARD – DISCUSSION OF PROPOSED ZONING
AMENDMENTS SUBMITTED BY ZONING STUDY COMMITTEE (ZSC)**

Proposed Commercial Business District

The Board reviewed maps prepared by Ms. Bubon showing the two areas proposed for a zoning change from Commercial to Commercial Business District. The maps are dated December 6, 2006 and depict the parcels that were recommended for change by the Zoning Study Committee. The map also listed acreages and building square footages of some of the larger parcels and businesses.

Mr. Cunniff explained the rationale of the Zoning Study Committee for bringing this forward indicating that the ZSC thought that this was a proactive measure that could help preserve the character of the area and was more sensitive to the surrounding residential areas than the current Commercial District. He stated that several of the square footages of businesses on Route 131 and Route 20 were questioned at the previous meeting. Those sites had been reviewed and the sizes are as follow: Roms – 18,584 square feet; Sherwin Williams – 17,306 square feet; Yankee Spirits – 52,180 square feet; American Motor Lodge – 35,157 square feet; and the Sturbridge Host 180,591 square feet.

Mr. Creamer thought that the Board members should decide if they supported the concept of a new Commercial Business District as the starting point for discussion before taking up the issue of square footage required. Members did however believe that it was necessary to discuss the square footage issue as part of this main discussion. The Board as well as members of the public (Charles and Mary Blanchard and Carol Childress) discussed a variety of issues related to square footage with a great deal of discussion revolving around why the limit of 35,000 square feet was chosen. Many thought this was too large and would not protect the character of Route 131 as indicated by the ZSC. Members that served on the Zoning Study Committee explained that while the original maximum building size was listed as 22,000 to 25,000 square feet, it became necessary to expand that maximum when it was decided to include Route 20. Additionally, members thought that 35,000 square feet was not excessive if you considered that a building could be two stories.

Discussion continued regarding whether Route 20 should be included in the proposal since a selling point for several members was that it was meant to protect areas in or near densely developed residential area. There was also discussion on what would happen to non-conforming uses if they were destroyed. Mr. Creamer indicated that question had been answered by Kopelman and Paige with the opinion they rendered on the automotive uses: Provided that reconstruction was initiated within a two year period, the use could continue.

The issue of reuse of the Host Hotel was also discussed at length. Some members were concerned with what would happen if they went out of business and could not sell the facility to another hotel business. There were no provisions included in the proposal to allow the re-use of that structure as either a retail or mixed use complex. The only alternative that would be available would be to comply with the new requirements. Some members thought that would not be an appropriate burden for a long-term business.

After continued discussion of both Route 131 and Route 20 and the proposed building sizes, the Board seemed comfortable with a square footage limitation of 25,000 square feet, indicating that using that maximum square footage allowed existing businesses to expand by nearly 40%.

Motion: Made by Ms. Dumas to accept and forward the new Chapter 17 – Commercial Business District as amended to the Board of Selectmen to begin the Public Hearing process for the purpose of placing this new proposed district on the Town Meeting Warrant.

2nd: Ms. Morrison

Discussion: None

Vote: 7 – 0

Motion: Made by Ms. Dumas to forward a proposal to amend Chapter 3, Section 3.01 Establishment of Districts by inserting as a new district Commercial Business District (CB) to the Board of Selectmen to begin the Public Hearing process for the purpose of placing this item on the Town Meeting Warrant.

2nd: Mr. Smith

Discussion: None

Vote: 7-0

Motion: Made by Mr. Chamberland to forward a proposal to amend Chapter 19, Intensity Regulations by inserting in its appropriate location, a new category for Commercial Business District using the same dimensional requirements as the existing Commercial District to the Board of Selectmen to begin the Public Hearing process for the purpose of placing this item on the Town Meeting Warrant.

2nd: Ms. Gibson-Quigley

Discussion: None

Vote: 7-0

Motion: Made by Ms. Gibson-Quigley to forward a proposal to amend the Town of Sturbridge Zoning Map by changing properties currently zoned Commercial District from the Southbridge Town Line to Farquhar and Willard Roads with the exception of #196, 178, and 0 Main Street, and #98 Fairview Park Road as depicted on a map prepared by the Sturbridge Planning Department and dated December 6, 2006 to the new proposed Commercial Business District to the Board of Selectmen to begin the Public Hearing process for the purpose of placing this item on the Town Meeting Warrant.

2nd: Mr. Chamberland

Discussion: None

Vote: 7-0

The Board took no action on the Route 20 portion of the proposal by the ZSC. The Board believed that this area certainly needs to be reviewed for possible changes, but that the proposed CB District was not appropriate for that area. Ms. Dumas stated that she could support that only if the group agreed to look at this area in this coming year. Board members were of the general agreement that this is an area that warrants attention in this coming year.

Proposed Accessory Unit Bylaw

The Board began its discussion of the proposed Accessory Unit Bylaw with a brief explanation by Ms. Bubon as to the purpose of such a bylaw. She indicated that she had prepared the bylaw using the State Smart Growth Model and that the intent of the bylaw is to provide a source of rental income for homeowners, provide middle income families with greater housing opportunities, and help older homeowners be able to stay in their homes. It also expands the housing stock of the community without using additional land and can accommodate the changing family structure of smaller households and extended households.

The Board and members of the public spent substantial time discussing where the accessory units should be permitted if they went forward with this proposal; should they be allowed only within the single family home, or should they be allowed in accessory structures. Some members believed that they should be allowed in accessory structures since many already existed, while others believed that they should only be allowed in the single family home or

attached accessory structures to help preserve the character of neighborhoods. Eventually it was agreed that new units should be allowed only in the single family home or attached accessory structure, while those currently in existence in detached structures would also be permitted. Other issues discussed were the square footage of the unit that would be allowed, members believed that 800 square feet was too large and through discussion this was reduced to 600 square feet or 20% of the square footage of the existing home whichever is less. Other sections of the proposed bylaw were also amended to allow for bonafide absences and to require a two year renewal. A minimum parking space requirement of 1.5 per residential unit with a maximum of five parking spaces total was agreed upon.

Motion: Made by Mr. Cunniff to accept and forward the proposed Accessory Unit Bylaw as amended to the Board of Selectmen to begin the Public Hearing process for the purpose of placing this new proposed section on the Town Meeting Warrant.

2nd: Ms. Gibson-Quigley

Discussion: None

Vote: 7 – 0

Motion: Made by Mr. Chamberland to forward a proposal to amend Section 20.21 Off Street Parking and Loading Spaces, Section 20.22, by inserting a in its appropriate location, a new category for parking requirements for Single Family Homes with Accessory Units of a minimum of 1.5 spaces per residential unit and a maximum of five total parking spaces to the Board of Selectmen to begin the Public Hearing process for the purpose of placing this item on the Town Meeting Warrant.

2nd: Ms. Gibson-Quigley

Discussion: None

Vote: 7-0

Motion: Made by Mr. Chamberland to forward a proposal to amend Chapter 5 - Use Regulations – Rural Residential District (RR), Section 5.02 – Exceptions which may be allowed by Special Permit from the Special Permit Granting Authority (SPGA) by inserting a new (m) Accessory Dwelling Unit, and to amend Chapter 6 -0 Use Regulations – Suburban Residential District (SR), Section 6.02 – Exceptions which may be allowed by Special Permit from the Special Permit Granting Authority (SPGA) by inserting a new (h) Accessory Dwelling Unit, and to amend Chapter 14 – Special Use District (SU), Section 14.02 – Exceptions which may be allowed by Special Permit from the Special Permit Granting Authority (SPGA) by inserting a new (f) Accessory Dwelling Unit to the Board of Selectmen to begin the Public Hearing process for the purpose of placing this item on the Town Meeting Warrant.

2nd: Ms. Gibson-Quigley

Discussion: None

Vote: 7-0

Proposed Sign Bylaw Changes Proposed by Mr. Malloy

The Town Administrator provided a memorandum to the Town Planner dated November 8, 2006 asking that the Planning Board discuss potential amendments to the sign bylaw. The proposed amendments include recommendations for ladder signs for multiple tenant properties, contractor signs and real estate signs. A final recommendation that all signs be designed with dark background with gilt lettering was not supported at this time with members believing that was appropriate for some areas of town, but perhaps not for other areas. After discussion, the Board agreed with most recommendations with modifications.

- Motion:** Made by Ms. Dumas to forward a proposal to amend Chapter 22 – Signs, Section 22.21 Multiple Tenant Properties, Section 22.23, Signs Not Requiring Permits (B) Real Estate Signs, and by inserting a proposed new Section 22.35 Contractor Signs and renumbering the remainder of the sections of that chapter as required with amendments as discussed to the Board of Selectmen to begin the Public Hearing process for the purpose of placing this item on the Town Meeting Warrant.
- 2nd:** Mr. Chamberland
- Discussion:** None
- Vote:** 7-0

Mr. Creamer and Mr. Cuniff thanked both the Planning Board members and the Zoning Study Committee Members for all of the time spent to carefully review and discuss the proposals. In addition, Mr. Creamer thanked Mr. & Mrs. Blanchard, Ms. Childress and Mrs. Goodwin for their participation in all of the proceedings.

On a motion made by Ms. Gibson-Quigley and seconded by Ms. Morrison, and voted unanimously, the meeting adjourned at 10:05 PM.