

Minutes of the Focus Committee Meeting, July 19, 2007

Present: Bob Fichtel, Chairman; Pat Frederick, and Gil Carreiro, with Town Planner Eric Smith. The meeting was held at the Stevens Memorial Library's Malcolm Stewart room.

The meeting was scheduled for afternoon rather than evening because the Stewart room was unavailable in the evening.

Chairman Fichtel called the meeting to order at 4:20 PM. Minutes of the June 27th meeting were distributed and read. Eric Smith made two corrections: insert Engineer Don Ouellette's given name (p.1, paragraph 7), and change the deadline date for the MRPC grant application to "July 23" (p.2, paragraph 1). The minutes, with both corrections, were accepted by unanimous vote.

Kevin Lashua has stated that he has clear title to the land on Rte.12. If in fact his title is clear, the Town will need to obtain an appraisal and a perc. test of the parcel. If no clear title can be shown, the Town could take possession of the property by eminent domain. Eric Smith will seek a grant for a 21e test, to ascertain that the parcel is not contaminated. Gil Carreiro stated that Kevin Lashua's father, Bill, used the parcel as dumping place for raw sewage from the septic systems his company pumped out.

Eric will submit an application to Glenn Eaton of the MRPC (Mass. Regional Planning Commission) on Monday, July 23rd, for Ashburnham to receive MRBRI (Mass. Brownfields Reuse Initiative) assistance.

Select Board Chair Mark Carlisle would like the Focus Committee to meet with the Selectmen, to give an update on the Committee's current projects.

Bob Fichtel updated Gil Carreiro on the GFA's plans to demolish the white frame house next to the hardware store on Main Street, and erect a branch office on the site. Because Richie Wright now owns the land occupied by the hardware store and its annex, the white house, and the video rental store, all these parcels can be listed as a single plot.

Gil was also updated on the popular opinions expressed at the charette; he is an abutter to the property under consideration, and may eventually wish to permit development of some of his contiguous land.

Gil said development can be by phases, flexibly; but whatever is done must be done right.

Eric said the state's Prior Development Fund has grant money available for helping towns design zoning plans and RFPs (Requests for Proposals).

Gil said the Town has a great need for rental housing, which will worsen without the white frame house's apartment units. He asked about the likelihood that a developer might offer to buy up all the houses on Puffer Street, tear them down, and build condominiums. We told him one Puffer Street resident attending the charette had said he would gladly sell his property to a developer and use the money to relocate down South.

Eric stated that we need to research any developer's past projects, to assure the Town of his reliability before entering into any agreement.

Eric reported that consultant George Allan will meet with Engineer Don Ouellette in August to review plans for the proposed new Highway Dept. building.

The Garlick family has not responded to letters or phone calls from the Town, concerning their land on Williams Road.

For the Committee's information, Eric distributed photocopies of the May, 2007 issue of ZoningPractice; the newsletter of the American Planning Association, which was devoted to Town Center Zoning.

Gil said whatever is built downtown must be pedestrian friendly, encouraging people to park their vehicles and walk from one Downtown destination to another. He added, there should be back street exits from parking areas to eliminate vehicles' entering major streets from multiple parking lot driveways.

Bob wondered if any realtor/s based in town would be willing to donate appraisals of land, as a Public Relations gesture, and to save Town spending.

The Committee discussed ways of bringing people to the town, as is done by some other towns offering flea markets, artists' shows and antiques fairs. Pat Frederick said the proposed Rail/Trail project should draw people to the town, and added that her own organization attracts about a thousand people per year, counting concerts attendance and Piano Study Center visitors.

The next meeting was scheduled for Thursday, August 23rd at 3:00 PM. Don Ouellette and George Allan will be invited to attend.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:09 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia H. Frederick, Secretary