



Ashburnham Village Center Zoning District Study Committee Meeting
Thursday, January 29, 2008, 7:00 PM
Senior Center, VMS Building

Members Present: Joseph Daigle, Stan Herriott, Diane Hill, Joseph Kalagher, John MacMillan, Elizabeth McLaughlin and, David Perry. Members Absent: Jonathan Dennehy and Jim Whidden. Staff Present: Eric R. Smith, AICP, Town Planner

I. Introduction: Committee members, Town Staff

Meeting was called to order at 7:00p.m. Each Committee member introduced themselves to the rest of the Committee, as Stan Herriot was attending his first Village Center Zoning District Study Committee meeting. Town staff present was Eric R. Smith, Ashburnham Town Planner. Stan Herriot provided the Committee members with an update on the Municipal Light Department's plans to celebrate their 100-year Anniversary, which includes removing the power lines on Main Street between River Street and Lawrence Street. The power lines will either be placed underground or in the rear of the Main Street lots.

II. Approval of January 17, 2008 Meeting Minutes

John MacMillan motioned to approved the January 17, 2008 Meeting Minutes. Seconded by David Perry. Approved by Vote of 6 to 0. Stan Herriot abstained as he was not present that evening.

As the Committee members reviewed and approved the 1-17-2008 Meeting Minutes, discussions were held on follow-up of a number of items raised at the first meeting: David Perry asked the Town Planner if he had contacted the City of Grand Rapids to see about how the new zoning for Wealthy Street Traditional Commercial Area was helping bringing in new businesses. The Town Planner noted he emailed a contact from the Grand Rapids Planning Department, but not has had a reply to date.

Regarding 38 Winchendon Road and the matter of illegal storage of vehicles/boats. The Town Planner noted that the Building Inspector did prepare a Notice of Violation to Mark Tansey, owner of 38 Winchendon Road back on November 13, 2007 regarding the storing/selling of junk vehicles. Since the owner of 38 Winchendon Road has not approached the Town regarding this Violation, the Building Inspector sent out a follow-up notice on January 22, 2008 and if the owner does not approach from 30 days of this second notice, the matter will be referred to Town Council.

III. Election of Officers (Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Clerk)

The Town Planner noted that at the last meeting the Committee decided to have elections for a Chairman and a Clerk and did not see need for a Vice-Chairman. Discussions were held

regarding nominations of Chairman position. Dave Perry nominated Stan Herriot, Chairman of the Village Center Zoning District Study Committee. Seconded by Joseph Daigle. Vote was 7 to 0 to elect Stan Herriott as Chairman.

Discussions of Clerk position were next. Elizabeth McLaughlin noted the good job that Eric R. Smith had done in preparing the January 17th Meeting Minutes. As the Town Planner, Mr. Smith is only an Ex-Officio member of the Committee. However, Committee members felt he could still be the Clerk for this Committee. Mr. Smith indicated he had no problem being Clerk, except that when he is giving presentations to the Committee he would need assistance from another Committee member to take minutes in such occasions.

Motion by David Perry to nominate Eric Smith, Town Planner, as Clerk for the VCZD Study Committee. Seconded by Joseph Kalagher. Vote 7 to 0 to elect Mr. Smith as Clerk .

IV. Discussion of Proposed Committee Charge, Outline, Timeframe

The Town Planner handed out the failed Village Center Moratorium Article from the November 2007 Special Town Meeting. Mr. Smith noted that Section 7.3 of the Article discusses recommended membership for the VCZD Study Committee and Section 7.4 of the Article discusses issues for the Committee to Study and ultimately Report on, including zoning bylaw amendments for the VCZD.

The Planner handed out a revised Suggested Outline for Developing Changes to the Ashburnham Village Center Zoning District. This revision adds under Section III(E) having the Committee consider amending the Zoning Bylaw parking space and *size* (emphasis added to reflect the change) requirements. The Town Planner also handed out an Excel spreadsheet entitled “Ashburnham Village Center Zoning District Study Committee – Project Outline with Timetable.” This document was prepared based on suggestion at last meeting by Joe Kalagher to have “Gant” style chart with Timeframe associated with the Project Outline.

The Town Planner went through each item in the Project Outline with Timetable. Diane Hill asked why does the Site Walk have to wait until March? Committee members all expressed interest in scheduling a Site Walk before then, weather permitting, even holding more than one Site Walk during the Project.

Town Planner noted that the issue of zoning for signs was not included in the Project Outline or the Timetable. Signage would be added to the Project Outline and Timetable, though the Town Planner noted that he felt the signage requirements added by the Focus Committee for the Village Center Zoning District appear to be working well.

Existing parking in the Village Center. Discussion was held regarding issue of allowing cars parked on-street in front of a lot owner’s property to count towards their off-street parking requirements. For example, True Value Hardware Store counting parking spaces on Main Street. The Town Planner noted that in the Village of Buzzards Bay in the Town of Bourne, their Village Center Zoning allows such spaces to be counted towards the businesses off-street parking space requirements. John thought such a requirement was in place here, but he misinterpreted Section 5.31. Joe Kalagher noted an existing Town of Ashburnham “Traffic Rules Document” which states where areas of off-street parking are and are not allowed. The Committee may want to consider reviewing this document and perhaps including any suggested recommendations to it as part of its Final Report.

The Town Planner discussed possible Public Outreach methods including conducting a Visual Preference Survey. Noted sample on Page 325 of the Small Town Handbook excerpts provided at the first meeting. A sample may be available from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC). But we would need to put in photos from the Town of Ashburnham. The Photos can be presented to the Committee with use of laptop and slide projector. Stan reminded the Committee that the Light Bills could be utilized to send out a one-page, double-sided survey.

Discussion of Village Center Development Permitting Review Process: Stan noted that the Bresnehan Scout Center will be a good example of all Town Boards working together to permit a project in the Village Center.

Dave Perry suggested trying to eliminate Site Plan Reviews for small projects, such as where a business replaces a vacant space. John MacMillan noted that within the Site Plan Review Bylaw revisions passed at May 2007 Town Meeting allow for change of uses and new construction of up to 500 square feet. Where such uses are allowed by-right, the Building Inspector is able to do an abbreviated Plan Review within 30 days (versus the 90 maximum days otherwise for Site Plan Reviews).

Discussion was then held on Committee members of ideas of changes to permitting process. Dave Perry noted that if Applicants needed a Site Plan Review from Planning Board and Special Permit from the Zoning Board of Appeals, the two Boards could hold a "Joint Meeting". John MacMillan noted that he prefer to see just one Board, with the Planning Board acting as the "Special Permitting Granting Authority" for projects in the Village Center that require both a Special Permit and Site Plan Review. Dave Perry believed such a process would be giving too much voting authority to one Board. Joe Kalagher suggested Special Permits go to the ZBA when there is no Site Plan Review and to the Planning Board when Site Plan Review is required. The Town Planner noted there will be lots of time devoted to discussing the Permitting Review Process (April through July, based on the proposed Project Outline with Timetable). Other possibilities were briefly discussed, such as the Town adopting the provision of MGL Chapter 43D, Expedited Permitting Act.

Joe Daigle suggested creating a list of what is wrong with the Village Center with objectives to work with in fixing the problems. This list would be in a Matrix format based comparing the objectives of this Committee versus the recommendations from the 2004 Village Center. The Town Planner would prepare this Matrix list for the next meeting, noting though that the 2004 Village Center zoning recommendations are what is in the Zoning Bylaw today (except changes to Section 5.34, Parking in the Village Center Zoning District, were passed at May 2006 Town Meeting.).

The Town Planner reminded Committee members that the Village Center and Residential-A Zoning lot size and frontage requirements go back to the 1973 Zoning Amendments. Stan noted that he came to Ashburnham around then and noted he didn't expect to see radical changes to the Zoning. Also he stated that he doesn't see people coming in to knock down the existing building stock.

Diane Hill noted a couple historically significant buildings in Ashburnham Village Center that are now gone: Methodist Church and the Oddfellows Building. The Cumberland Farms strip center replaced the Methodist Church and the Ashburnham Family Medicine replaced the Oddfellows Building. The Cumberland Farms development is not in keeping with historical Village Center character. Dave Perry noted that at least the fuel pumps proposed at Cumberland Farms was turned down by the ZBA.

Elizabeth noted that a number of businesses have folded over the past 18 years, though physically the built landscape has not changed too much, but the Village Center had a bookstore and German Deli, for example. Joe Kalagher noted allowing rental apartments upstairs to allow more people and have mixture of uses.

The Committee discussed the Route 140/Route 12 commercial area in Winchendon, which has been able to develop an active commercial area with number of stores and restaurants. John MacMillan noted that years ago the area was just a field. Increased traffic with re-routing of Route 140 helped bring more traffic to support commercial businesses.

Dave Perry discussed idea of tax incentives. The Town Planner noted approval of such incentives would be outside jurisdiction of this Committee to adopt, but could review possible ideas for tax incentives and include in the Final Report any such recommendations. The Town Planner would explore this idea further with the Committee, including different possible tax incentive tools. One example would be Tax Increment Financing. The Town Planner noted that Scott Foster did qualify for a Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit for the renovation to the Old Harness Shop Building at 78 Main Street. Stan noted that Ashburnham Municipal Light has attractive electric rates versus other communities such as Fitchburg.

Elizabeth McLaughlin inquired if there was a “Welcome to Ashburnham” type of guide for businesses looking to come and/or start in Ashburnham. Stan noted existing “Welcome Bags”. The Land Use Office has put together a Permitting Guide (The Town Planner showed this Permitting Guide to Committee members).

Diane Hill noted importance of maintaining the Town’s visual quality and design issues need to be considered during this process. Also don’t forget other related issues such as signage and landscaping. Stan noted the Ashburnham/Westminster Rotary is looking to put in a garden and are asking the Selectmen for a location.

V. Analyze Existing Conditions.

The Town Planner noted tonight we have already begun discussions on a number of the items on the Project Outline in this category. At this time, the Town Planner discussed the existing zoning district boundaries (with use of GIS Map to show zoning district boundaries to Committee members), minimum lot size (25,000 square feet except for elderly housing per Footnote #6 of the Zoning Bylaw) and minimum frontage requirements (125 feet).

VI. Scheduling of Future Meeting(s)

The next meeting of the Village Center Zoning District Study Committee was scheduled for Tuesday, February 12, 2008 at 7:00p.m. It was suggested to try and schedule a Village Center Site Visit for some date/time following the next meeting.

VI. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn was made by David Perry. Passed by a vote of 7 to 0. Meeting was adjourned at 9:00p.m.

Meeting minutes submitted by Eric R. Smith, AICP, Town Planner