

**Minutes of
The Williamstown Planning Board
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2015
7:00 p.m. at the Municipal Building**

Members Present: Amy Jeschawitz, Chris Winters, Ann McCallum, Carol Stein – Payne, Elizabeth McGowan

Others Present: Andrew Groff, Atty. Jay Sabin, Atty. Sherwood Guernsey, Bill Frado, Joan Blair, Bruce McDonald.

Ms. Jeschawitz opened the meeting at 7:00 PM.

MINUTES

Mr. Winters moved to approve the September Minutes.

Mr. Winters seconded.

The Motion Carried Unanimously.

ANR

Hancock Road: McGill

Louisa Volpi explained that this change is needed for a new septic system.

Mr. Groff noted that the septic plan has been approved by Con Com and the Board of Health.

Mr. Winters moved to find that Approval is Not Required under the Subdivision Control Law finding that no building lot is created.

Ms. McGowan seconded.

The motion carried unanimously

Oblong Road: Sweetbrook Farm

Brian Kocela explained they are proposing a new building lot at Oblong and Woodcock Roads. This is a 10 acre parcel.

Mr. Winters moved to find that Approval is Not Required under the Subdivision Control Law finding that sufficient frontage and area are present.

Ms. McGowan seconded.

The motion carried unanimously

NEW BUSINESS

Chamber of Commerce (E. Watts)

Ms. Emily Watts introduced herself as the recently appointed director of the Chamber of Commerce.

Ms. Watts stated that her approach as Chamber director is to be a communicator and ensure that the business community and the Town keep open lines of communication.

Ms. Watts added that the Holiday Walk is coming up soon on the 5th of December and this is a Chamber sponsored event that the entire community should attend.

Ms. Watts added she is also working on continuing professional development for the business community as an exciting ongoing project.

The Planning Board thanked Ms. Watts for attending.

OLD BUSINESS

Waubeeka & Five Corners

Ms. McCallum introduced the discussion for Five Corners and Waubeeka for a possible re-zoning by giving an introduction on the topic.

Ms. McCallum noted that Mr. Michael Deep approached the Planning Board recently and the Board agreed to look into the possibility to creating a zoning district at Waubeeka to allow a hotel. This is an effort to attempt to make the Waubeeka course more economically vibrant.

Ms. McCallum added that it seems that some folks might have been upset by a Planning Board idea to include some areas of the Five Corners Historic District in a possible zoning change to address some non-conforming use issues with the Store at Five Corners and the adjacent and now closed farm stand.

Ms. McCallum also gave a description of why agricultural uses are so difficult.

Ms. McCallum noted that this issue of the stores having zoning difficulties is one issue. The Board's concept was to address this problem and the question of the hotel at the same time. Additionally there is a specific method of

allowing only a hotel. This would be an overlay district specifically for a portion of the Waubeeka property. This is opposed to a very restricted base zoning district for the entire neighborhood.

Ms. McCallum stated she would really like to hear from the community what they envision for this area, how does the community really want this neighborhood to address these perceived issues in their neighborhood. This should be an open discussion on these topics.

Mr. Paul Harsch, Flora Glen Road, stated that he is not present to speak on behalf of the Economic Development Committee of which he is a part.

Mr. Harsch commended the Board for investigating this particular area and working with the golf course. This particular part of town has a commercial history behind it. In fact at one point it did have a major hotel, the Idlewild. Other commercial operations have been present in the area, such as Kapiloff's Glass. The Planning Board is currently trying to address a need that is of greater and greater concern in the community. How will this Town address loss of population and business that impacts the entire community? The Economic Development Committee was reminded at their earlier meeting that there are very high taxes in this community. Relative to the Town's square acreage it is difficult for businesses to survive, this is true of the farm and the golf course.

Mr. Harsch read an email from the Board from a couple from Texas. This couple wanted a building with nine foot ceilings allowing business on the ground floor and retail beneath;

Dear Paul,

We appreciate your looking into the how we might be able to do a gallery in Williamstown, but we have discussed this between ourselves and decided that the zoning so limits the stock of available properties that we no longer are considering Williamstown as a potential location. We are not inclined to play a game as a non-profit when that really is not our aim, which is to have a gallery. We greatly appreciate the time and trouble you have expended on our behalf.

Thank you,

James and Kimel Baker

Mr. Harsch stated that he provided this email to illustrate the challenges prospective businesses face in looking to locate in town.

Mr. Bruce McDonald, 255 Hancock Road, stated that the Board summed this issue up well with the statement on "selling shovels" at the Green River Store.

Mr. McDonald provided a photograph of the golf course from his home to the Board.

Mr. McDonald added that a hotel is very acceptable at this location. The big concern at this location is what the building will look like. It was mentioned at the last meeting, the Bedford Inn in Bedford, NH. This is the type of development we should be trying to emulate. This is not a matter of being concerned about shovels being sold, or what type of use is ongoing. The problem is what the building looks like.

Mr. McDonald added that the issue with the Store at Five Corners is that the historical character of the building must be maintained. It doesn't particularly matter what the use is, retaining the structure is key. Losing a structure such as the tavern that formerly was in the area is key.

Mr. Andrew Hogeland, of 2143 Cold Spring Road, stated that the way the last meeting went that it looked to him that the discreet overlay district on the golf course was option A, option B would be a broader district. It seems after the last meeting that the consensus was letting Mr. Deep proceed with designing and crafting an inn on the golf course. It seems that option B should be taken off the table because it is far broader than Mr. Deep needs to place his inn. The problem with option B you increase the amount of uncertainty in the neighborhood. It makes folks wonder if they can support the entire issue or not. Perhaps the issue should not be complicated by this factor. The preferred use of the Store at Five Corners is what it is now. The site is constrained by much more than zoning. Title 5, parking, and other issues constrain the store more than zoning.

Mr. Harsch stated that Mr. McDonald noted the import of aesthetics. Can some type of architectural standard be included? A prime example of these type of visual standards is the construction of Dunkin Donuts.

Mr. Winters stated that Dunkin Donuts was not required to build to this standard by the Town Government.

Mr. Winters added that Mr. Deep is going to act in his best interest. No guest wants to stay at an ugly hotel. He or another developer will build an ugly hotel. It is also important to note that this community has never had aesthetic standards or aesthetic zoning. We start slowly but do we want to go down the road of aesthetic standards? Can it lead to someone being told what color to paint their home?

Mr. Brian Gill, 387 Hancock Road, noted that he teaches golf at Mount Greylock High and that Waubeeka is a huge partner in offering golf to this community and to the school. Mr. Deep always noted how beautiful the property is and how this is an asset. Mr. Deep will not build an ugly hotel that will detract from the golf course. The Board should support something that can be an asset.

Ms. Annie Bell, 216 New Ashford Road, stated she resides across the street from the course, and also works at the

course.

Ms. Bell stated that this is a place of employment for many, not just herself; this place is an economic driver. A hotel would be an asset. This is also a markedly different project that what was envisioned by the Staywarz Family in the late 1990s. This project will benefit all of Williamstown as a whole. Additionally there is a need for more lodgings in this community. This is something that should be encouraged.

Atty. Stan Parese, representing Mr. Deep, stated that Waubeeka was constructed as a golf course in 1966. There are not many businesses that have existed for 50 years. The reality of Waubeeka's business model is that it is obsolete and is not sustainable. Were the course not to be there, no one would come to the community and construct the course in its current state. The fact is this is a difficult business to be in and collecting revenue is very difficult. It is also weather dependent and for these types of businesses without other sources of revenue the course itself is simply not viable. This has occurred for many reasons, equipment is more complicated, maintenance standards were different, and employment law was different. The world is simply more complicated.

Atty. Parese stated that in terms of the conversation surrounding the adjacent neighborhood. The idea was to think of a comprehensive manner of addressing the hotel and the neighborhood issues. There were also some points from the community that this might be too much. This is not an issue one way or another.

Atty. Parese also noted in terms of aesthetic requirements. One would be hard pressed to make the site worse, the current building is dated. The goal is for a building that the entire town will be happy to have there.

Atty. Parese stated that Mr. Deep's objective is to build an extraordinarily tasteful and beautiful building. What the Town's policy perspectives are in terms of aesthetic standards, this is up to the town. Mr. Deep only needs to have the leeway to allow a talented architect to do a proper job.

Mr. McDonald asked if Atty. Parese would accept certain limits on the site such as geographic constraints, room number constraints, and architectural standards.

Atty. Parese stated he would not be comfortable with setting a room number. This is a study that must be done by professionals that can analyze the market carefully. The answer to these questions will also be constrained by other factors, however the bottom line, we do not want to predetermine constraints to an optimum business model.

Atty. Parese stated additionally in terms of aesthetic standards Mr. Deep does not want to retain the right to build an ugly building. The demographic that is coming to South Williamstown will not be staying at a Red Roof Inn.

Mr. McDonald stated that a limit on the number of rooms could be needed as the size of the overall development.

Mr. Groff stated that a special permit process is long and specific. Engineering and other studies are done so that the zoning board can make an informed decision on a development. The discussion right now is on the framework on which to base that decision.

Ms. McCallum asked the attendees their thoughts on going back to a base zoning district for all of five corners as opposed to simply the golf course.

Ms. Elaine Neely of 137 Woodcock Road stated she is in favor of making changes that would allow changes that would not just allow a hotel but would allow all the businesses in that area to be viable. Further the hotel is important as golf courses stand-alone do not work. We are strangled as a town, if the only revenue is coming from residential payers this is a problem.

Ms. Neely further noted that the businesses that exist in the area need some help.

Ms. McCallum stated that a hotel is also not an easy business we should not over emphasize the hotel. We should think beyond the possibility of having just a hotel. We're about to change our rules. We need to think about what we might be open to if the hotel fails.

Mr. Hogeland encouraged Ms. McCallum to move forward with the overlay option.

Ms. Neely stated that many years ago there was a design requirement before Town Meeting. This was widely opposed by the College Art Department.

Mr. Winters stated that the overlay option avoids consequences but does create spot zoning concerns. This is not planning this is reactionary. Planning is looking at the whole area and saying do we want to allow commercial activity here as it was in the past. The political reality is that if we want this hotel, we have to do the overlay. If the hotel is successful, the store will come to the Board, the farm will come to the Board, and others will come to the Board. Then the Board will, in hindsight, regret the easy political decision right now in the present.

Mr. McDonald agreed with Mr. Winters, but added that the overarching concern is the appearance of the structures and ensuring that they retain the historical nature of the neighborhood. The uses and the appearance are two totally different questions. Nantucket still looks like it did in 1852, so can this area. The uses should not be as restricted as they currently are.

Ms. Blair expressed some confusion with the process.

Ms. McCallum noted that the Board right now is trying to seek community input.

Ms. McCallum asked those in attendance what they would think of the district.

Ms. Ann Hogeland stated she has major concern on traffic. This (US 7) is a highway that is running through a neighborhood that when it was vibrant was a dirt lane. This is an extremely dangerous area and many concerns are present if the Board was talking about a broad brushed change.

Ms. McCallum stated her take is that the community would not want to create a broader district.

The neighborhood expressed additional concern about traffic.

Mr. Winters noted that this is beyond the scope of the discussion tonight.

Mr. Hogeland stated he would like to discuss the specifics of any district that has been determined.

Ms. McCallum noted that an overlay box has not been designed as of yet as the Board did not want to preclude a hotel from being built on the best possible site.

Ms. McCallum read the draft for the Board and discussed specifics.

Mr. Groff added that each provision in the draft is carefully considered to balance community need and developer need. This proposal is supposed to be a framework through which a developer can design a proposal and present it to the ZBA. IT is also a framework on which the ZBA can base their decision.

Ms. McCallum noted it is quite controversial if you have design elements or not.

Mr. Harsch stated that design guidelines such as those presented are appropriate.

Mr. Winters noted that this is a slippery slope. We can start generally, and move down towards some very restrictive zoning policies. Who will these policies be enforced against? Who will be able to respond to them? Even if these are guidelines, they aren't really needed.

Ms. Blair stated she is delighted with what has been heard this evening. It is troubling however, that the golf course is not mandated. The goal is to preserve the golf course, not to allow a larger resort.

Atty. Parese stated that zoning cannot force people to do something, for this reason the golf course cannot be mandated.

Ms. McCallum do we want to carry on with this overlay discussion?

Mr. Winters stated we should delve into the overlay district more deeply.

The Board agreed to delve into the overlay option and abandon the option of expanding a business district into the surrounding five corners area.

Housing Policy Study

Office Space Zoning

The Board agreed to table these items until Nov. 10.

The meeting adjourned at 9:30 PM.