

Minutes of
The Williamstown Planning Board
TUESDAY, JANUARY 13, 2015
7:00 p.m. at the Municipal Building

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

Others Present: Andrew Groff, Louisa Volpi, James Art, James Kolesar, Vince Guntlow, Nancy Nysten.

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

Members of the Board introduced themselves to the public.

Mr. Winters noted that the Board does not have a quorum to begin this deliberation without invoking the Rule of Necessity, as described by the State Ethics Commission, for the public record.

Mr. Winters noted that the State Ethics Commission has been consulted about this particular conflict with Williams College and advised the use of the Rule of Necessity.

Mr. Winters stated that the Board will not have a quorum without invoking the rule. Mr. Winters continued by stating that his conflict of interest is that he is employed by Williams College's Provost Office.

Ms. Jeschawitz stated that she has an appearance of a conflict of interest as she works in the hospitality industry.

Ms. McGowan stated that she has a conflict as she is employed as a Professor by Williams College.

Ms. Stein-Payne stated that she has a conflict as she is employed by the Williams College Health Center.

Ms. McCallum stated she does not have a conflict but will recuse herself for the hotel discussion as she is a member of the project design team for that item.

ANR

Peter Wilmot: Ide Road

Louisa Volpi of Guntlow and Associates stated that this is simply the change of an interior lot line, nothing will actually change in terms of ownership on site. This is dictated by a Land Court decision.

Ms. McGowan asked if the Board has any objections to the plan.

Mr. Winters moved that the Planning Board find that Approval (under the Subdivision Control Law) is not required for the plan for Peter Wilmot of Ide Road.

Ms. Jeschawitz seconded.

The Motion Carried Unanimously.

New Business

Parking Determination: Stetson Sawyer Project Phase 3, New Green

Attorney Jamie Art representing the College stated he is asking for a modification of the parking determination to allow additional parking spaces in the area between Park Main and Southworth Streets. This will allow the College to provide additional accessible spaces in the area beyond what is required from the Architectural Access Board.

Some reshuffling of parking will also occur as Chapin Hall Drive will lose its parallel parking and will no longer be open to through traffic. A new lot is proposed behind Chapin Hall at the site of an existing construction trailer.

In total with all the reshuffling a new parking lot the total increase in spaces on this quadrant of campus will be 13 in total. The College is present tonight to ask the Board to allow the overall increase in parking spaces.

Mr. James Kolesar of Williams College added that he is not aware currently of how the spaces will be allocated in terms of department but they are restricted to faculty and staff.

Ms. Jeschawitz asked if the Church is negatively impacted on Sundays.

Atty. Art stated that it is anticipated that folks will use the parking lot behind Chapin Hall or utilize the Science Drive or Spring Street.

Mr. Kolesar stated that knows many parishioners of the church and members are aware of the change and most park in the lot now but will be such as in the science quad, impact will be minimal.

Mr. Vince Guntlow added that the loss of spaces in the Congregational Church lot is strictly to provide improved circulation.

It was additionally noted that the board of the Church is aware of the changes and fully supportive.

Ms. Stein – Payne moved to approve the Parking Determination as submitted.

Mr. Winters seconded.

The motion carried unanimously

Old Business

Ms. McCallum recused herself from the discussion as she is a member of the hotel project design team.

Potential Zoning Change for Spring Street

Ms. McGowan noted that Mr. Groff pulled together a blank sketch map and each Board member has drawn their own interpretation of where the line should be drawn.

The Maps were presented on the meeting room projector and a map submitted by Williams was added to the end of the presentation.

Each board member described their individual maps. Ms. Stein Payne and Ms. McGowan encouraged a closer in development emphasizing very close integration of the hotel with the street.

Mr. Winters and Ms. Jeschawitz favored a broader change more in line with what Williams has previously proposed noting that this seems to be a better hotel location while adding that the line should be drawn as to stay to the east of the significant topography change to shield any development from properties on the Knolls.

The Board expressed broad support for including a straightening of any zoning district boundary along Spring Street's western edge to provide for overall consistency in the zoning.

Atty. Art stated that the final map was submitted by the College and is an overlay of the wetlands on site with existing conditions. The wetland areas do constrain the site as building on an inner riparian zone is quite complex to permit as the Commonwealth wants to limit the impact of development on these sites. The idea behind the project is to try and limit these impacts and develop in previously disturbed areas as they are easier to build on than undisturbed areas.

Mr. Kolesar stated that the parking is not shown either, if the Board is just thinking about the building placing it close to the street is possible but the parking must be created too. This area also must be zoned VB.

Mr. Kolesar added that there are many issues with placing the building directly on the street including displacing the parking in a way that the retail merchants do not want and causing the College to use areas for parking that might have higher and better uses.

Ms. Jeschawitz stated she is concerned about the flatness of this development, the spread out ness of the parking seems to be contradictory to the intent of the Village Business District. It is concerning that the parking might not accommodate the entire suite of uses on the site and might be very spread out. Once again this does not seem compact and walkable.

Mr. Kolesar stated that a parking structure is not being considered for the site.

Atty. Art stated that there has been a realization that the expansion towards the Knolls must be minimized. The parking will be kept entirely along Dennison Park Drive. This would be behind the knoll that provides a natural buffer from the neighbors. This footprint is likely the best overall footprint that came be designed within the natural and regulatory constraints on site.

Ms. Jeschawitz asked about the legality of extending the paths associated with the hotel through the wetlands Mr. Groff stated that this area would not have to be zoned VB to accommodate paths. This can be viewed as a separate project. This could fall under the College's education use exemption status.

Ms. Stein Payne stated that most town's people have stated they would like to see the hotel on the street.

Mr. Kolesar stated that this is not the desire of the business community and he and others are concerned about the adverse impacts of such a siting plan. There are also major wetlands implications in such a siting plan.

Atty. Art stated that the plan is still at the early stages even this proposed design will change in some material way. The footprint may get larger or smaller. There is no intent to withhold information from the Board. The College simply needs to understand that there is a district that allows this use before the resources are committed to create a fully formed design. The Zoning Board will thoroughly review the project and ensure that the project does not adversely impact Spring Street.

Ms. McCallum added that it could be possible to place the hotel on the street and place the parking on the disturbed Agway site.

Ms. Stein Payne stated this placement of the hotel seems like it would be preferable.

Ms. McGowan added that locating the hotel on the municipal parking lot could be possible.

Ms. McGowan stated that she has asked Mr. Pudderster about this idea and was told that the design consultants

did not recommend such a solution.

Mr. Winters stated that the Board cannot lose sight of the public meeting that was held in November. We have all spoken individually to folks but at that meeting the merchant community on Spring Street expressed a great deal of enthusiasm. It is also concerning that we seem to be venturing further and further into designing the actual project. This Board must decide if extending Village Business is a good idea now and into the future and it seems the answer to this is yes.

Ms. Jeschawitz stated that the Board has enough information to make a decision on this issue. It should now be broken down into several questions.

Mr. Winters asked the Board if it was agreeable that any amendment straighten out westerly line of Spring Street? The Board noted this should be included.

Mr. Winters stated that the Board must now decide on the westerly bound south of Walden and the bound to the south

Ms. Jeschawitz stated that she is comfortable with the 550 foot boundary proposed by Williams.

Ms. Stein Payne stated that the merchants want an inn. It seems that the College cannot accommodate something in a different space. If 550 feet is what is needed to accommodate the inn this is what the Board should do.

Mr. Kolesar clarified, noting, this is not what the College needs it is the area that we believe will accommodate the best design.

Ms. McGowan stated that the southern line should be north of the Oakley Center.

Mr. Winters stated that the status of the Oakley Center bears no relevance to this particular project but it makes sense to allow the turning of the corner for the future if the hotel starts to create some growth pressure. It should be included.

Ms. Stein Payne asked if the Board is considering changing the zoning designation on the section of Walden to the east of the science center access.

Ms. McCallum stated that she would be in favor of such a change, but cautioned the Board not to extend any change too far along Walden Street.

Mr. Kolesar added that the smaller The Board makes the box for the hotel the stranger the parking becomes. It gets pushed to place like the Wilmot lot or McHugh's building. This is not something we want to do we want to allow the parking to be at the periphery and allow density closer in.

Ms. McGowan stated the Board should strongly consider placing any line north of the Oakley Center to protect the building's occupancy.

Mr. Winters noted that the current plan is not to demolish Oakley, it is an educational use, the line is somewhat irrelevant.

Mr. Guntlow added that the development team could live with the line at the more northerly location but flexibility would be better.

Mr. Groff noted it is important to note that there is a 20 foot setback for residential properties at the back of the district as the lot abuts residential land.

Ms. McGowan added that the Oakley Center is for faculty on leave. This property should be protected as quiet place of academic research. The concern is any parking being placed behind the Oakley center could disrupt the activities there.

Mr. Kolesar stated that the current director of the center didn't show particular concern about the Oakley Center being negatively impacted by either parking or the Hotel.

Ms. Jeschawitz stated that a compromise could be drawing the line at the edge of the pavement. It is also important to note that the change of topography east of the building likely prevents this area from being used as parking.

Mr. Winters stated that the applicant is going to note that the view of the Oakley Center from the proposed inn site is an asset they are not likely to change the view with parking.

Ms. McGowan stated she remains in favor of creating a boundary north of the existing Oakley Center building.

Ms. Jeschawitz and Mr. Winters stated they are both in favor of a line drawn at the edge of the existing paved area south of the Oakley Center.

Ms. Stein-Payne stated that in the interest of a more compact plan she is in agreement with Ms. McGowan.

Mr. Winters also encouraged the Board to discuss extending the line down Latham Street to include the northerly section of the football stadium property.

Ms. McGowan directed Mr. Groff to prepare two maps of the property for the February meeting. One map showing a line north of the Oakley Center and an additional map showing a line south of the Oakley Center.

The Board tabled discussion on the Village Business Re-Zoning until the February 11, 2015 meeting.

Ms. McCallum returned to the discussion.

Solar Bylaw

Mr. Winters stated that he and Mr. Groff have made great progress on a solar bylaw.

Mr. Winters added that this is partially due to the amount of action on solar occurring across the state. Adams has recently enacted a bylaw and the state has adopted a new model bylaw.

Mr. Winters stated that some key policy decisions must be made in the bylaw draft. The Board needs to tonight define small medium and large system sizes and where (in what zones) do we allow these uses.

Ms. McCallum questioned why in accessory uses there is different definitions that in the primary use category. For example, why is a large system accessory by right in Rural Residence 2 (RR2)?

Mr. Winters noted that this change was directed at farms. This might be thought of differently than someone buying a parcel simply for export of power to the grid as the primary use of the land would remain agricultural. The bylaw is simply encouraging farmers to take advantage of additional income opportunities.

Mr. Winters noted that the size of specific systems will be controlled by the definition of accessory use in the bylaw.

Nancy Nylen from the COOL Committee stated that her group is looking at renewable energy opportunities and she has been looking at other communities that have gone through this process and others that have used the state model bylaw. Sizing is an important issue, in terms of community based solar there has been a great deal of interest in a local community scale solar system. It looks like to the medium size recommended by the state is 40,000 square feet. This is the model that the COOL Committee would like to follow. We would not want to inadvertently limit a project that could be a benefit to the community. We would like to see some more leeway on that dimension.

Mr. Winters noted that the sizes are easy for Town Meeting to amend, if we get it wrong now. They are not set in stone.

Mr. Winters additionally stated that anything on a roof is allowed in any zoning district.

Mr. Winters asked if the Board would be willing to table the article to allow the COOL Committee and Town Staff more time for research.

The Board tabled discussion on the Solar Bylaw until the February 11, 2015 meeting.

Administrative Changes

Mr. Groff stated that this change has been drafted by town staff to reflect changes in the structure of the Community Development Department. It is also necessary to rectify long standing issues with the names of various positions in the bylaw.

Mr. Groff stated that the bylaw presently references the Building Inspector, Inspector of Buildings, Planning Administrator, Zoning Enforcement Officer, and Town Planner as officials with varying responsibilities. Over the years Michael Card as Building Commissioner has been the de-facto Zoning Enforcement Officer as is the default by Chapter 40 A of MGL. Other responsibilities have been picked up by varying individuals overtime with the Town Planner position, now Community Development Director, overseeing nearly all co-ordination with the public, board members, and administration function. It is hoped that the change by defining two individuals, a Planning Administrator, and a Building Commissioner clarity will be brought to the bylaw and the Zoning Enforcement Authority will be placed with the Planning Administrator who will also be responsible for day to day administration of the bylaw. The definition as proposed names the Community Development Director or another individual to be appointed by the Town Manager as the Planning Administrator.

The Board agreed that this change is necessary and should be pursued.

Ms. McGowan called for a motion to approve the amendment and send it to the Board of Selectmen.

Ms. McCallum moved the requested motion.

Mr. Winters seconded.

The Motion carried unanimously.

Discussion

Economic Development

Andrew Hogeland stated that the Board of Selectmen have put together an Economic Development Commission to focus on job loss, population loss, and an effort to stabilize the community now and into the future. The Commission's goal is to put together a plan in the next 12 months to increase the likelihood that someone will want to do business in the community and grow the community. The first thing the committee identified that must be done is outreach. A subset of things to be considered for this Board is zoning. If there are easy fixes that can be done for town meeting this year we should do them. If there are things that the ZBA sees all the time, perhaps could we make home businesses easier? Can we do other things to simply make business simpler and easier without losing the integrity of the process? It is important to note as well that the five members of this board are valuable members of the community and we hope that you would want to be continually engaged in the process going forward. Any suggestion is helpful. There is a discussion of having a joint meeting with the Planning Board. We would like to discuss this on Monday February 9th. Here at 7 PM. The EDC is also scheduled to meet Mondays opposite Selectboard meetings.

The Board accepted the invitation to hold a joint meeting with the Selectboard on Monday the 9th of February.

Ms. McCallum noted that for basic changes why don't we just get rid of the parking requirements for Water Street?

Ms. Jeschawitz stated that in regards to economic development parking as a whole is an issue that must be looked at in its entirety.

Andy long term problems should not preclude short term solutions.

Ms. McGowan noted that all board members should attend the meeting on the 9th with the Board of Selectmen.

MINUTES

Mr. Winters moved to approve the minutes from December.

Ms. Stein Payne seconded.

The motion carried unanimously 5-0

The meeting adjourned at 8:15 PM.