

BELMONT WARRANT COMMITTEE FY08 MEETING MINUTES
FINAL
OCTOBER 10, 2007, 7:30 P.M.
CHENERY MIDDLE SCHOOL COMMUNITY ROOM

The meeting was called to order at 7:33 pm by Chair Curtis.

Present: Chair Curtis; Members Allison, Brusch, Callanan, Epstein, Heigham, Jones, Lynch, McLaughlin, Oates, White, and Widmer; Town Treasurer Carman, Assistant Town Administrator Conti; BOS Chair Firenze, School Committee Chair Bowe, Assistant Town Accountant Martin; Planning Board Chair Jenny Fallon, Planning and Economic Development Manager Jay Szklut; and Oakley Neighborhood Association members Elizabeth Gibson and Joanna Hilgenberg

Absent: Town Accountant Hagg, Town Administrator Younger, Members: Hofmann, Paolillo
Chair Curtis began the meeting by inviting the Oakley Neighborhood Association (ONA) and Planning Board members to discuss Article 9 as well as additional zoning-related warrants.

Warrant Article 9: Oakley Neighborhood Zoning Overlay

Jenny Fallon (Chair of the Planning Board) provided an overview regarding the Overlay Zoning Amendment as it pertains to the Our Lady of Mercy Church property. The property is presently zoned to allow for 6 single-family houses. However, under a Chapter 40B override for zoning, the number of housing units allowed for (including affordable units) would cause considerable density to the neighborhood. This is a concern to the neighborhood. A zoning overlay based on Smart Growth's Chapter 40R would allow some rise in density with its affordable housing numbers, but it would also allow some local control in design standards. Fallon continued: the proposed 40R overlay has the full support of the community as well as the unanimous support of the town's Planning Board. Elizabeth Gibson added that the Oakley Neighborhood Association (ONA), which has been central in putting forth this overlay proposal, has 20-25 active members, who have been meeting for over 2 years. What is proposed here (the 40R overlay) she said, is a compromise - one that all parties can live with. Chair Curtis asked: if Town Meeting adopts the 40R overlay, would this then preclude a 40B development? No, 40B can't be precluded, responded Fallon; but the 40R overlay adds another option for development not available currently.

Member Widmer requested that the ONA board characterize the objectives of what it is trying to accomplish. Fallon stated that the neighborhood desires an alternative to those possible development plans that would overwhelm the neighborhood with density. "We want fewer units than 40B, but more than it is presently zoned for" (5 or 6 single-family houses). BOS Chair Firenze offered that 40R alternatives are typically driven by financial incentives in other communities. Jay Szklut (Planning and Economic Development Manager of the Planning Board) stated that 40R was written to address the financial concerns that come up with 40B. 40R, he said, provides incentives for a developer to make an acceptable offer that the Archdiocese will accept and that also works for the neighborhood. The Archdiocese wants to maximize the amount of money it can get for the sale of this property, added Fallon.

Member McLaughlin asked if it would be possible for the town to pay the Archdiocese [or whoever proposes to develop the property] to agree not to file a 40B? "McLean was paid to limit its amount of units - can this happen here?" he wondered.

Member Brusch asked what was possible under the 40B scenario? Jay Szklut replied that a six-story building with hundreds of units is possible.

Chair Curtis then asked: Does the WC want to take a position to recommend to Town Meeting on this issue? It's something the WC doesn't usually address, he added. Several WC members felt it would be helpful to have some data (financial numbers pertaining to comparative costs, tax revenues, Upland's numbers, etc.) before deciding whether or not to take a position. Member Widmer agreed with Members Brusch and Oates: we will examine the different options (40B, 40R, 5 houses) and make a recommendation based on what is in the best financial interest of the town. Member Allison added that by laying out the consequences of these options, the WC is acting appropriately in providing the town with the financial implications. BOS Chair Firenze

responded: "What concerns me is that the numbers are speculative; they won't provide meaningful enough information."

Elizabeth Gibson asked the WC to please support the 40R overlay to protect the town. "It is in everyone's interest to limit the number of units. Eighteen is as high as people feel comfortable with." Jay Szklut added that it is difficult to "measure the qualitative costs of putting up a multi-level building in this kind of neighborhood. Zoning is more than a tax revenue question; it doesn't come down to just the numbers." Members Bruschi and Widmer assured the ONA that the WC would look at more than just the numbers. Chair Curtis said that this will be on the agenda for next week, and that the WC will decide then whether or not to take a position.

Other Warrant Articles

Chair Curtis asked Ms. Fallon to discuss Article 6 ("Amendment to Zoning By-law: Accessory Building Setbacks"). This warrant pertains to changing the word "garage" to "accessory building" in a certain section of the zoning by-laws. There is no substantive effect, she explained, it is just a word change to make the by-law correspond to current practice.

Article 7 ("Amendment to Zoning By-law: House of Worship Parking Lots"), she continued, allows houses of worship (i.e., churches, etc.) to permit their parking lots to be used for parking when not needed for church functions. This would allow a house of worship, for instance, to contract with a nearby business [i.e., one within 400 feet, if the language of the warrant is adjusted as intended] to have parking on that church lot. It is now not possible to make such a contract. Member Allison asked if the church will receive money to provide parking use? Yes, Fallon replied. She continued: What is currently already happening with regard to the use of church lots for business parking, would be made legal.

Article 8 ("Amendment to Zoning By-law: Special Permits for Banks") pertains to the issue of banks in Belmont. Jay Szklut explained: Many people in Belmont feel there are already too many banks in this town. People want to have better control over this. For example, there is a proposal on the table for new bank branch on Pleasant Street. If this warrant passes Town Meeting, the branch would be allowed, but a proposed drive-through window would not be. Member White offered that since there is no economic impact to this warrant, there is no need for the WC to discuss it further. Chair Curtis and others agreed.

Subcommittee Assignments Chair Curtis distributed a handout (which will also be available electronically) with the 2007-2008 WC Subcommittee Assignments on it. He suggested that each subcommittee meet and elect a Chair.

Other Warrant Articles Regarding Article 2 ("Pipeline Assistance Loan Program"), Member Jones noted: "0% borrowing is a good thing. We should support it."

Regarding Articles 3, 4 and 5, the WC will vote next week regarding what recommendations (if any) to make. September 26 Minutes Accepted The minutes of September 26, 2007 were accepted with one adjustment. (All voted in favor, with 3 abstentions.)

Executive Session Chair Curtis motioned at 8:46 to go into Executive Session for the purpose of discussing collective bargaining. Curtis stated that the WC will not go back into session when Executive Session ends. In a roll call vote, all members voted in the affirmative to go into Executive Session.

The WC came out of Executive Session at 9:19 pm (adjourning the main session as well).

Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio
Recording Secretary