

PLANNING BOARD MEETING

Minutes, December 16, 2003

Members present: Joseph Barrell, James Heigham, Deborah Emello, Andrew McClurg
Karl Haglund
Also present: Tim Higgins, Senior Planner

7:05 p.m.: The meeting was opened by Chairman Joseph Barrell.

- The minutes of November 25th were approved unanimously (5:0).

- **439 Common Street – ZBA Petition**

James Heigham presented each member a copy of a letter of recommendation to the Zoning Board of Appeals concerning the above site. This positive recommendation was voted previously at the ZBA meeting. There was no discussion and it was endorsed by Chairman Barrell.

- **Meetings for 2004**

The meeting schedule for 2004 was discussed. It was agreed to meet on 1/27, 2/24 and 3/30.

April was left open due to Town Meeting.

- **Zoning Amendments:**

Tim Higgins asked about future zoning changes so public hearings can be scheduled. Mr. Higgins will send out a memo within the next week listing issues to be considered. The intent will be to present articles to an April Town Meeting. Joe Barrell asked that the issue of Setback lines be brought back for consideration. A brief discussion ensued on setback lines and removing the non-controversial lines first. The need to rezone for the re-use of the Waverly Square Fire Station will also have to be considered as the Fire Station feasibility study will be completed.

7:18 p.m. O'Neill Public Hearing: The residential rezoning petition was opened with the reading of the notice by James Heigham. Mr. Heigham began the discussion by questioning whether the Board is open to changing the zoning in general before members proceed with any detailed discussion of the petition. Andy McClurg questioned Karl Haglund's position on the petition. Karl Haglund has spoken on the issue but will recuse himself from voting.

James Heigham dismissed the option of preserving the site as open space. This is due to the lack of money to purchase the property and the inability of the Town to legally prevent development. The most desirable part of the current petition is the affordable housing and senior housing component. He suggests the best residential option may be through the use of Chapter 40B. It is easier for the town to influence and harder for the opposition to litigate against. He has not made up his mind at this point.

Andy McClurg wanted to know if the Planning Board has other options such as a development with fewer units. James Heigham says the Board does have the ability to recommend modifications to the petition. Andy McClurg doesn't like residential use due to the geographic isolation of the site. It is really more a part of the Alewife industrial area. The only positive aspect of the residential option is the affordable housing component.

Karl Haglund suggested taking a different position on several issues such as increasing the size of the buffers to make the property less desirable for development. He would like to see development be moved to the old MDC ice-skating rink site.

Deborah Emello stated that she is undecided but believes the site is more suitable for non-residential use. However, if it is approved it will probably be litigated and take many years to resolve. The residential proposal is denser than she likes. She also says there are unresolved issues.

Joseph Barrell noted that the Board is here to look at the long range benefits to the Town – not necessarily the benefits to the petitioner. He dismissed the ecological arguments noting that they are not relevant to the rezoning questions and that they are best resolved at the Design & Site Plan Review process. The Alewife area (Cambridge) is undergoing significant development pressures –mostly commercial. Environmental issues will remain in either a commercial or a residential development. He asked if the original decision of the Town to vote to change it to commercial was defective. He does not believe the change was a mistake.

There was a general theme that the only reason the petition is being seriously considered is due to financial considerations. The area is most suited for non-residential development. It is the best long term plan but economics are playing a very large role in the review process. A lengthy discussion ensued.

James Heigham suggested that the Public Hearing be continued to the January 27, 2004 meeting. Written comments should continue to be accepted – but only based upon the discussion this evening. Joseph Barrell asked that all comments be directed to the rezoning change not to ecological issues. A motion was made by James Heigham to continue the public hearing to 7:15 p.m. on January 27 as noted above and it was so voted 5:0.

8:00 p.m. Trapelo Road/Belmont Street Corridor Workshops

Andy McClurg presented a power point show on the Trapelo Road/Belmont Street Corridor. He explained a series of work shops (5) that he coordinated on the concept of creating a design scheme for the corridor. The meetings were well attended and very productive. Many good ideas were exchanged. Members of the Traffic Advisory Committee (TAC) attended every meeting and participated in the discussions. Most of those in attendance agreed that the existing pavement was too wide. His theme was to

answer a simple question “How does the road work”? However, the answer was clearly very difficult and complex.

He suggested that the Planning Board come up with recommendations on roadway design and concept and submit them to the Board of Selectmen for their disposition. It is important that the TAC be heavily involved from this point forward. BEDPG and the Vision 21 Implementation Committee should also be actively involved in this important process.

Andy McClurg explained the problems created by the 60 feet (plus) of pavement along the corridor. It promotes bad driving habits as there are no lines on the pavement except at the signalized intersections. He noted four different options that could be employed to change the layout of the street and sidewalks. These could all be employed at some point within the corridor. He then discussed various traffic calming options and the existing “bump-outs” being installed by the TAC. Mr. McClurg also presented his recommendations for lane cross sections at various locations along the corridor. He noted that 2 lanes each way are essential in the squares. (Traffic counts are essential to confirm his finding). Raised medians could be employed in selected location subject to Fire Department concerns.

Widening sidewalks and increased planted areas are strongly recommended. These will require maintenance but are important to enhance the pedestrian environment and improve the overall streetscape along the corridor. A three lane cross section (middle turning lane) could also be used in select locations.

He recommended against striping the corridor into four (4) lanes end to end. Travel speeds would increase, the character of the street would be of a commuter route rather than a “Town Street”. He also doesn’t believe that the volume of traffic is high enough to merit such a configuration. He noted that there are two critical issues here – (1) preservation of emergency access and (2) maintaining a safe efficient design as users transition from one “treatment” to another. Several residents spoke after the presentation complimenting Andy McClurg on his work and effort to date.

9:30 p.m. There being no further business, the meeting closed.