

TOWN OF BELMONT
PLANNING BOARD

MEETING MINUTES
February 24, 2010

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BELMONT, MA.

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7:10 p.m. Meeting called to order

Attendance: Jennifer Fallon; Chair, Sami Baghdady; Karl Haglund, Carla Moynihan, Andres Rojas; Jeffrey Wheeler, Staff

7:15 p.m. Comprehensive Plan Discussion

Jenny Fallon introduced the Comprehensive Plan discussion and the expectations for the evening. Larry Koff presented a power point presentation and gave an overview of the process of developing the Plan. Jenny Fallon presented the land use vision map.

Larry Koff began to review the 9 recommendations.

1. Design Guidelines and Review Process
2. Economically Viable Development that Complements the Town's Historic Character

Jenny Fallon stated that the focus on design came out of the tension people have around increased density in commercial areas and proximity to residential neighborhoods. Carla Moynihan suggested that a form design code should be a strategy and that perhaps it's a hybrid of a form based code. Karl Haglund mentioned that there is a difference between applying design in commercial areas and residential areas. Ms. Fallon agreed and added that staff will need more resources to better show what design means.

Conversation then focused on the Vision Statement and what preserving 'small-town' character means while living in the 21st century. All agreed that 'small-town' character does not mean 'no development', but rather development that looks like Belmont. Larry Koff suggested that design review can help balance the tensions between small-town character and development. Andy Rojas added that design and form based zoning is where the Town is headed but it will take a lot of work to get there. Ms. Fallon stated that if the Town moves toward more design control it will need more assistance with doing this – it will have to bring a variety of interests to the table. Discussion then followed on what is form based zoning.

3. Clarify Land Use Vision for Each Commercial Area
4. Revitalize Commercial Centers through Public and Private Improvements

Jeanne Mooney wanted to know the full impact of the zoning for the entire district – what could it look like? Andy Rojas explained that form based zoning deals with parcels and that all parcels are different and that form based zoning takes into account all of the issues. He added that the zoning would give guidance to developers as to what the Town wanted to see. Carla Moynihan added that conditions can still be placed on the use, i.e. hours of operations.

Discussion followed on what does 'clarify land use vision' mean and that it is intended to deal with the hierarchy of uses. Jenny Fallon stated that the Town needs to get its arms around the true costs of residential development and that this will help the Town become more comfortable

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with this issue. Roger Colton expressed concern about how the Town accounts for others interests and not just the immediate abutters. He added that the question should be 'what is good for Belmont'. Discussion then ensued about how to get the community involved in the process. Andy Rojas stated that part of role of the Planning Board is to take into account the interests of the town not just the immediate neighborhood.

5. Enhance Connections through Open Space, Pedestrian and Bicycle Infrastructure

Jenny Fallon stated that the ability to make connections with other neighborhoods is the one thing that we think about with small-town character.

6. Link Public Facilities and Financial Planning to Land Use Priorities

Discussion ensued about what this recommendation means and all agreed that it needed to be further clarified

7. Improve and Promote Public Transit

Ann Paulsen commented that 1 and 2 bedroom apartments in the commercial areas will improve ridership of public transit. Jim Stanton raised the issues of tension between transit parking and commercial parking. All agreed that parking is a difficult issue.

8. Expand Housing Choices

9. Reinforce Belmont's Neighborhood through Natural and Historic Protection

Anne Paulsen stated that the Town needs a demolition delay by-law and a by-law to protect specimen trees. Jenny Fallon stated that the Town needs to establish criteria to determine what is appropriate. Barbara Passero added that street trees are critical to what neighborhoods look like.

Discussion then followed on which recommendation is most important. The feeling in the audience was that all 9 recommendations are important - it is a Comprehensive Plan and therefore all should get done. Jenny Fallon added however that the Planning Board can only work with one or two at a time. She emphasized that the Planning Board is keeper of the Plan but it is a Plan for the entire Town - everyone has to own a piece.

A follow-up conversation then took place regarding form based zoning. Larry Koff explained that it is very cost intensive to draft and suggested that there were other ways to achieve the same objectives such as listed in the chart at the end of the zoning recommendations. Andy Rojas indicated that he liked the tiered approach as presented in the chart. The Board agreed to review this further.

9:30 p.m. April Town Meeting Schedule

The Board agreed that there needs to be place holders for the Comprehensive Plan, parking requirements and outdoor café seating, and removing building set lines. Discussion then

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followed about how to get the Board of Selectmen involved with the Comprehensive Plan and what to present to Town Meeting.

The Board reviewed its meeting with the Board of Selectmen on March 1st and the issues to be discussed - Cushing Square Village and zoning amendments.

9:40 p.m. Outdoor Café Seating/Parking

The Board discussed the cap limiting the number of outdoor seats. The Board agreed to limit the number of outdoor seats to 20 and that the issue was ready to go to public hearing.

9:50 p.m. South Pleasant Rezoning

The Board reviewed the staff memo on the issues confronting Pleasant Street and discussed the assets, liabilities, and potential uses for the area. The Board felt that noise in the area can be a tremendous liability. Sami Baghdady questioned what the vision for the area should be. He wanted the Board to think about the intensity of use and what was the appropriate level of development. He thought residential uses should be allowed and expressed concerns about the views to McLean hill. The Board discussed the boundaries of South Pleasant Street versus Waverley Square and expressed concern about the intersection of Pleasant St. and Trapelo Rd.

10:25 p.m. Cushing Square Village

The Board discussed what financial information the developers should provide. All agreed that the numbers should be based on other projects and that they should not include costs for the environmental remediation. The Board also wanted to know what the additional cost are necessary to build a mixed use development and that they need to provide a model that demonstrates that they need a certain density because of the cost to develop this project.

10:50 p.m. Meeting Adjourned

Next Meeting: Wednesday, March 10, 2010, 7:00 p.m., Board of Selectmen's Meeting Room, Town Hall.

4/14/2010 MINUTES APPROVED