

PLANNING BOARD MEETING

Minutes, March 25, 2003

Members present: Joseph Barrell, Deborah Emello, Karl Haglund, James Heigham, Andrew McClurg

Also present: Tim Higgins, Senior Planner - Jeffrey Wheeler, Planning Coordinator
Richard Jabba, Cecil Group – Michael Abend, Abend Associates

7:01 p.m. Meeting opened by Joe Barrell, all members present.

7:05 p.m. – The meeting minutes from March 10, February 25th March 10th (open session), and March 13 were approved unanimously.

7:10 p.m. Trapelo Road zoning map amendment The Public Hearing notice for proposed the proposed zoning map amendment for the Kendall property on Trapelo Road was read by James Heigham. There was no discussion and on a motion by J. Heigham, the Public Hearing was closed without finding or a recommendation (without prejudice) on the proposal.

7:12 p.m. Inclusionary Zoning By-Law Proposal The Public Hearing notice on the Inclusionary Zoning By-Law proposal was read by James Heigham. The first portion of the hearing was to determine that there were material and significant differences between the current petition and the one being considered this evening. This would allow the petitioners to bring a revised article to Town Meeting as a repetitive petition. Mr. Roger Colton, Chairman of the Belmont Housing Trust presented a memo detailing the differences between the two petitions. Based upon this information the Board voted 5:0 to find that there are substantial and material differences between the two proposals. James Heigham finished reading the Public Hearing notice on the new proposal.

Mr. Colton was introduced and presented a brief history on the proposed by-law since its rejection by nine (9) votes at the fall Town Meeting. He observed that there was a big problem with the commercial aspect of the initial component of the proposal for a variety of reasons. In response, the proposed increases in density and intensity of use have been eliminated. Now the proposal applies to all three business districts since there is no proposed density increases. Elimination of the dollar payment option from non-residential developers was also eliminated.

He noted that Planning Board supported the petition last year and that the reasons for supporting it remain and he asked for Planning Board support.

Deborah Emello had a question concerning the definition of a “Belmont resident”. Is there a minimum time limit a person must reside in the community? No, the Supreme Court states that specified time requirements for residency are problematic.

Bill Engstrom asked for a definition of Inclusionary Zoning. Roger Colton replied that it is a discretionary method of creating affordable housing within a community. It will not increase density or give additional development rights to a developer. It is not a 40B Program (this is a state affordable housing program that over-rides local zoning).

Hale Bradt. Is the option to make a cash payment in lieu of actually developing the housing still available? Yes, with some minor changes with Zoning Board of Appeal involvement.

Roy Epstein – How are people selected to enter the units and does this expose the Town to litigation? There is a procedures manual developed by an expert for the Housing Trust. The application process is lengthy and detailed to ensure compliance by the applicants. There is also a deed restriction limiting the profit margins on projects if/when they are sold. This keeps them affordable.

Andrea Marchiani wanted to know who administers the program. The Belmont Housing Authority under contract would/could do it.

James Heigham moved that the Planning Board recommend the proposal to the Annual Town Meeting. It was supported 5:0.

7:40 p.m. Community Planning Program: Joseph Barrell asked Andrew McClurg to chair the discussion on the Belmont Community Planning Program. Andrew McClurg stated that he wanted to discuss the latest draft of the “Goals and Objectives” and then have traffic consultant Mike Abend make a brief presentation on transportation issues.

Planning Coordinator Jeffrey Wheeler provided those present with a revised Goals and Objectives list with comments received to date.

Joseph Barrell noted that traffic calming should also involve greater enforcement – not just physical improvements. A discussion ensued. Tim Higgins recommended that enforcement be added as an objective and that implementation be left to others (TAC for example). Andrew McClurg wants to be sure that the Corridor road is a one lane (each direction) except in designated areas (intersection for example). He believes that the Town can have satisfactory traffic flows with pedestrian improvements. The following new text was considered as “Objectives”:

1. Enforcement, regulatory and administrative options be employed to slow down vehicles.
2. Lane widths should be standardized except in specified locations (re: additional lanes are necessary in specific locations).

Meg O’Brien noted that any physical improvements to the road must be responsive to the public transportation and the need for other vehicles to pass buses when they stop.

Mike Abend noted that it is an easy road to drive as all turning movements can be made with little congestion. A single lane will change this.

Dorothy Bradt was pleased to see the involvement of the Planning Board and the citizens on this issue. She commented on traffic calming on Trapelo Road and at the bus stops and need for buses to reach the curb.

Sara Oaklander and Roy Epstein noted that the bus/trolley route should be more important in the Goals and Objectives. Moving bus stops were also mentioned. The benefits, problems and possible design of bicycle lanes were also discussed.

Michael Abend from Abend Associates, sub consultant to Cecil Group then spoke on Transportation issues. He is just beginning his work and is developing an understanding of the corridor flows. For example, east bound traffic in the morning is lower than he expected but west bound in the evening is quite busy. Understanding the important turning movements is important. He also needs to understand the Town's goals and objectives to develop ideas. Then he will develop and recommend some next steps. He will create a road map of what needs to be done to implement improvements.

Abend Associates will collect traffic data at key intersections. He wants to be sure any proposed changes do not adversely impact flows.

A comprehensive parking study would be desirable. He suggests looking at the corridor as one unit for street improvement planning purposes and then adjust "the plan" as needed in response to specific problems and/or intersections. A consistent treatment will enhance safety along the entire corridor. Traffic enforcement is a big problem and essential to maintaining the safety of the motorists and pedestrians employing the corridor.

Upgrading the signals (such as a Belmont Street and Trapelo Road) is essential for proper flows and safety. Location control, signal ownership and the design criteria for new signals were also discussed. The need for pedestrian counts was discussed. It is not important to have specific counts but any plan must acknowledge their presence and respond to the need.

The need for the "Village Centers" to be distinct and observed by drivers is essential. This will slow down drivers as they enter these commercial areas. Developing a consistent vocabulary when referring to street improvement is the first step in implementing a program. A village center also promotes use by motorists (re: shopping).

Michael Smith and others talked about the concept of "Village Centers". Is it appropriate given that the commercial areas are "squares". A discussion ensued. How many areas are to be considered? Three, four or five? (East Belmont Street, Central Square, Palfrey Square, Cushing Square and Waverley Square). This needs to be resolved but it was agreed that the targeted areas would still be referred to with their historic "square" names.

It was also agreed upon that the April 15th work session of the Board need to focus on the following issues:

1. What areas are we going to center on?
2. Need more emphasis on private improvements
3. Refine goals and objectives
4. Develop plan for Town Meeting
5. Transportation Issues

9:15 p.m. There being nor further business, the meeting was adjourned.