

PLANNING BOARD

MEETING MINUTES

September 5, 2006, Conference Room 2, Belmont Town Hall

Members present: Karl Haglund, Chair; Sami Baghdady, Jennifer Fallon, Andrew McClurg, Andres Rojas

Also present: Jeffrey Wheeler, Planning Coordinator

7:10 p.m. Meeting called to order

7:10 p.m. General Business

- The August 22, 2006 minutes were approved.
- Committee Updates -
 - Belmont Center Planning Group (BCPG): All agreed to meet with the BCPG as soon as possible especially because of the re-zoning of Cushing Square - both proposals could enlighten each other. Sami agreed to contact the BCPG to see if they could meet with the Board on September 26.

7:20 p.m. Discussion with the Permanent Building Committee (PBC) regarding the review of Municipal Buildings

Karl Haglund gave an overview of the purpose of the discussion – how to implement the amended Design and Site Plan Review (DSPR) section of the Zoning By-Laws. The goal he added is to set forth more clear conditions when DSPR applies to new buildings. He stated that the Planning Board has had a consistent focus on the exterior of the building and not the interior. Jennifer Fallon added that the DSPR process could be helpful.

Pat Brusch, representing the PBC, stated that the amended by-law already includes DSPR for review of municipal buildings. She mentioned that several municipal projects have already come before the Board through DSPR; the Board, however, needs to have clearly defined requirements. She recommended putting together a primer so that committees could see what they are required to submit.

Karl Haglund mentioned that the Board had several questions raised to it about the Town Hall renovations. He stated that the Planning Board provides a forum for the public to discuss the design of the building and enhance the public open space. He mentioned the new CVS building on Trapelo Road as an example of how successful the process can be. Andy Rojas concurred and offered several examples at the new fire station on Trapelo Road: 1) the loss of existing trees

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at the rear of the fire station – there was no provision for the protection and maintenance of these trees; and 2) the proposed shrubs were not appropriate nor were enough proposed for the site.

Robert McLaughlin, of the PBC, questioned the process and stated that the one criticism that they constantly hear is that projects are overly vetted. Pat Bruschi stated that throughout the building process there are various design professionals who critic the projects and look for improvement. She added that the PBC holds many public meetings to discuss the projects – some meetings are specifically set up for the neighbors to comment. Sami Baghdady commented that the Planning Board has specific statutory requirements to publish and mail notice of the meetings.

Jeffrey Wheeler explained the purpose of DSPR was not to deny a project but for the Town and the developer to come to consensus on a plan. Robert McLaughlin cautioned that more public process allows for more opportunities for the neighborhood to appeal the decision. Karl Haglund mentioned that the PBC focuses on the immediate neighbors and the Planning Board wants to make sure that everyone is involved. Andy Rojas added that even though the project may meet the by-law does not mean that it is the most optimal design – the DSPR process allows for redesign of the site. He further added that he would prefer to see plans earlier rather than later. Jenny Fallon cautioned that the Board must figure out a process that allows for early review without violating the public hearing legal process. Pat Bruschi mentioned the Senior Center landscaping plan as an example – everyone is at polar opposites – Donna Moultrup (Health), Peter Hoerr (Police) and the Planning Board all want something different. Karl Haglund stated that the department head's views are opinions and not statutory requirements and suggested having a conversation with Town staff regarding how to resolve such discrepancies. Andy Rojas stated that the DSPR process could be the forum to take input and potentially waive these requirements. He added that the role of the Planning Board could be to review comments by the staff and decide what to apply. Pat Bruschi suggested that this could be an informal process and recommended that the department heads attend the public hearings. She cautioned, however, that such early input regarding additional design features could have cost implications. She recommended that the initial review be at the schematic design stage. Robert McLaughlin suggested a two tiered process: 1) schematic design review; and 2) public hearing and added that this could be helpful to the voters. Andy Rojas concurred and added that the public hearing then becomes a simpler more efficient process.

Pat Bruschi offered the Planning Board a position on the PBC. Karen Pressey suggested that this could be through the schematic design stage since after that the design issues go beyond the scope of the Planning Board. Pat Bruschi suggested that this could be a liaison position and agreed to begin to set this up.

Karl Haglund stated that he would like the Board of Selectmen to understand that the Planning Board is expecting to conduct DSPR on all Town buildings. Jenny Fallon added that the Planning Board is working with the PBC to develop a process to review public buildings. All agreed that drafting of a primer be done after Town Meeting. Jenny Fallon emphasized that this

is a change in how the Planning Board operated in the past – the Board is trying to be more proactive instead of reactive.

8:40 Discussion on Meeting with the Board of Selectmen on September 25

Jeffrey Wheeler reviewed a handout on implementing the recommendations for the Corridor Study. Andy McClurg mentioned that the Cushing Square re-zoning is a test case for the next areas along the Corridor. Jenny Fallon added that this was a chance to publicize what has been done and is an opportunity to start getting support for the zoning amendment. Sami Baghdady suggested that the Board should have an outline of broad themes to discuss. Jenny Fallon added that the Board will have to provide an overview of what overly zoning is and communicate what the Board is trying to accomplish with this proposed zoning amendment. For example, density provides other opportunities for development that also has economic and urban design considerations. All agreed to discuss the particulars of the re-zoning at their next meeting.

9:00 Meeting adjourned

7/26/06 Approved Unanimous