

PLANNING BOARD MEETING

Minutes, July 15, 2003

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

Members absent: Deborah Emello

Also present: Tim Higgins, Senior Planner, Jeffrey Wheeler, Planning Coordinator

7:05 p.m.: There being a quorum the meeting was opened by Chairman Joseph Barrell. Mr. Barrell turned the gavel over to member Andrew McClurg to convene the discussion on the Economic development Plan. Mr. McClurg noted that he wanted to review the draft recommendations from the Cecile Group presented to the Planning Board during its last meeting. He then introduced Ken Buckland from The Cecil Group.

Mr. Buckland employed display boards to outline the planning options facing the Planning Board. He talked about establishing four (4) Land Use Zones as distinct districts. Each would have a separate set of design criteria, zoning, streetscape improvements and densities. The four districts would be:

- (1) Belmont Center,
- (2) Town Squares
- (3) Transition Areas
- (4) Residential Areas

To support the business districts, he recommends that mixed use and increased densities (multi-family development) be promoted in most of these areas. For example the suburban areas would be predominantly residential (allowing multi-family) to provide homes for people who will patronage the businesses in the downtown and/or Town Squares.

Other recommendations included creating “gateways” into the Trapelo Road/Belmont Street corridor, creating individual identities for each Square, supporting the re-use of the Waverly Square fire station and employing smart growth principles where appropriate. For example, building a parking garage over the rail line at Waverly Square with retail and residential users on the first levels was proposed. This issue was discussed briefly and Tim Higgins noted that Office of Community Development has contacted the MBTA planners to schedule a meeting later in the week to open a dialogue on it.

Mr. Buckland then spoke in greater detail about specific zoning changes that should be considered in each of the four proposed districts.

He then moved on to transportation concerns including bicycle and pedestrian improvements. New parking garages, as proposed by the BSC Group in its March 2002 Municipal Parking Study were strongly supported. An eight (8) step circulation improvement strategy was discussed in detail. It would improve safety for all users (vehicle, pedestrian and bicycle). He observed that this information has been provided to the Board and is on the Corridor Web Site.

Mr. Buckland concluded with a proposed work plan to implement the recommendations. This is a long-term process involving both public and private improvements. It is expected that it will 5-10 years before the results will become apparent. The steps included:

Step #1. Adopt a “Master Plan” for Economic Development,

Step #2. Amend the zoning by going to Town Meeting to create four new zoning districts with specific criteria for each (this will guide the private sector improvements) and,

Step #3. Create a Public Facilities Plan to define and implement streetscape improvements through a capital improvements program (this is the public expense component).

The discussion then turned to the next steps for the Planning Board. Tim Higgins first asked that the Board agree upon the concept of the four land use/zoning districts. Sara Oaklander suggested that the Board employ the existing nomenclature for the downtown (Belmont Center) and the Town Squares. People are familiar with these. “Suburban” should be “Residential”. This was quickly agreed to. Sue Bass asked that historical preservation be more important and include historic structures and how new zoning would impact them.

A lengthy discussion ensued on the ability/desire to regulate national food chains and their “formula” signage and colors (re: golden arches were considered inappropriate). They can be limited by dimensional guidelines such as maximum floor area and setbacks. Sara Oaklander noted that BEDPG is performing a market survey now to determine what businesses would want to locate in the Town Squares.

Bill Ingstrom had several questions concerning “Transition” zones. These are the areas that about the Town Squares have mixed uses. He expressed concern with the total build out under the proposed zoning and its impacts on the neighborhoods. He wants 3-dimensional visual photographs of all areas to be rezoned. This was thought to be excessive.

Two examples of “transition zones” were discussed: Trapelo Road east of Cushing Square and the area surrounding the Waverly Square Fire Station. Both areas have a mix of residential and business uses. The existing zoning would only allow two (2) residential units to be placed in the fire station – this would be underutilizing this large structure. There was no consensus on whether these areas should be residential or allowed to continue to become more business oriented.

Implementing the plan and the municipal costs were discussed briefly. It will take time (5-10 years minimum) and involve private funds and state funds. For example, the streetscape improvements will require public funds and won’t occur until the Town reconstructs Trapelo Road & Belmont Street.

Andrew McClurg suggested that the Board discuss the individual segments of the corridor at the next meeting. The proposed zones could be applied using the large scale map. The overall planning process will be lengthy involving discussions on each of the individual segments along the corridor. There are no funding alternatives available at this time.

It was also agreed to move forward on minor zoning changes immediately. Staff will put together a memorandum on short term options and recommendations for the fall Town Meeting.

Marion Cote from Predict 4 provided the Board with comments on the Planning process. They will be discussed on the 29th.

9:05 p.m. Meeting adjourned.

The next Planning Board meeting will be July 29, 2003 in the Selectmen's Meeting Room in Town Hall.