

PLANNING BOARD MEETING

Minutes, July 29, 2003

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

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

7:00 p.m.: There being a quorum, the meeting was opened by Chairman Joseph Barrell.

- The August 26 meeting was cancelled and rescheduled to September 9th with a meeting being held on September 30th.
- The meeting minutes from June 24 and July 15, 2003 were approved unanimously
- Senior Planner T. Higgins noted that a memorandum was sent from the Office of Community Development to the Board of Selectmen in support of a requested curb-cut. This was for the installation of street trees and “bump-outs” at the former VW site at 270 Trapelo Road. (The Board had voted to support this petition during the recent public hearing on the new building.) It was discussed briefly as it will be a “test” for future improvements along the corridor. Possible “gaps” in the plantings was expressed as a concern. Tim Higgins suggested that the Town should commit to advocating for funding for a municipal street-tree program to supplement any private sector finding.

7:05 p.m.: Public Hearing on the Re-Zoning of the Belmont Uplands

The Public Hearing on the proposed re-zoning of the Belmont Uplands to allow residential development was opened. Reading of the Notice was waived (4:0 vote) and the hearing was immediately continued to September 9th at 7:05 p.m.

7:15 p.m.: Economic Development Plan/Corridor Study

Andy McClurg outlined what the Board wanted to accomplish on the Economic Development Plan this evening. Specifically, the four proposed Land Use Districts, the possible physical locations of each of these “districts”, streetscape details and proposed zoning amendments for consideration at a fall Town Meeting were all to be discussed.

Ken Buckland from the Cecil Group distributed a colored map along with a revised set of recommendations (these will be placed on the web site). He then opened the discussion on the four proposed Land Use Districts. He observed that Belmont Center as the civic center of the Town is unique enough to be considered individually and not with the other squares. Mr. Buckland then began to discuss the Town Square concept. He walked the Board through each proposed Land Use District. “Transition” areas would generally be about the Squares with an emphasis on higher residential density and perhaps businesses by Special Permit. The “Residential” areas would be for two-family uses with multi-family allowed by Special Permit.

Ken Buckland then discussed his revised land use map and where each of the four land use districts could occur. (This plan will be placed on the study web page). A discussion took place on the proposed limitations on national chain stores and the impacts of such a prohibition. The intent would be to restrict chain stores by size to limit the adverse impacts on local businesses. At a later meeting Karl Haglund would like to address establishments that serve food and require a significant amount of parking.

Henry Kazarian, a resident of King Street, raised questions about the proposed 16 units/acre. It was explained that this is a concept for the “Residential” and “Transition” areas along the corridor-not and not meant for all of the GR zoning districts. All agreed that stable residential neighborhoods should not be considered for re-zoning. The Transition areas are the most difficult to plan for since there are many ways to interpret the word “transition”. The pluses and minuses of moving zone lines to the lot lines was also reviewed. However, it was noted that this discussion will occur in great detail during the next phase of this process.

It was decided that the proposed Residential area as indicated on Ken Buckland’s handout between Waverly and Central Squares would be more suited to Transitional. “Transitional” means that the future of the area could change to either “residential” or “commercial”. The impacts of the re-use of the fire station on this transitional district were discussed at length. Still, the Land Use Districts are conceptual, not at a zoning level at this time.

The benefits of adding residential zoned land to commercial zoning was discussed. This planning process is not an effort to rezone residential to commercial but an opportunity to examine existing land uses and determine the appropriate zoning. Specific rezoning will be determined by situational review of each zoning district along the corridor.

Tim Higgins discussed the recent memorandum from OCD to the Board of Selectmen concerning the potential to develop the air rights over the rail line in Waverley Square. Board members were copied on this. The MBTA is looking for support from the Town to enter into a cooperative venture to determine the feasibility of such a development. The Board of Selectmen are expected to act on this at their 8/4 meeting.

8:40 p.m. Jeffrey Wheeler walked through his July 24th memorandum to the Board concerning proposed zoning changes that could be brought to a Fall Town Meeting. Significant changes in restaurants are being suggested. Also deleting the front-yard setback along with the old building set-back lines that pre-date the zoning by-law and deleting the payment in lieu of providing off-street parking was recommended. This action was also recommended by Town Counsel. Payment in lieu of parking doesn’t work in Belmont because there is not sufficient commercial activity to support such a program.

Tim Higgins noted that OCD is looking for guidance from the Board on the proposed rezoning initiatives. Text can be developed over the next three weeks for the Board’s

informal review at the September 9, 2003 meeting. If the Board wanted to proceed at that time, a Public Hearing could be held in October or late September for inclusion on a Warrant for a late November Town Meeting. The Board agreed to have OCD draft textural changes.

There was a brief discussion of the benefits of promoting “mixed use” in the business districts. The concept has been consistently supported by the Board throughout the public participation process.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:05 p.m.

The next meeting of the Board is scheduled for September 9th in the Selectmen’s Meeting Room.