

Plainfield MA

Joint Boards Meeting #1

January 21, 2021

Creating a Community Development/Preservation Strategy

Present: Rebecca Coletta and Hilary Weeks, Select-board members, Brian Hawthorne, Jerry Little, Bob Silberberg, Peter Lapointe and Judith Cole, Planning Board members, Judy Williams, Judy Ferber, Jack Nelson, Erik Burcroff, Alice Schertle of the Conservation Commission, Peg Keller, Bill Latimer and Joan Wattman of the Zoning Board and Matt Shippee, interested citizen.

Welcome and Introductions

Peg Keller (ZB Chair) opened the session. The context for this gathering is a result of ZB members feeling unaware of the activities of other town entities working on community development/preservation issues. Peg noted that since the bulk of the ZB's future workload will be minimal (now that Special Permit/Site Plan review authority has been transferred to the PB) the ZB is available to assist in other ways. Assisting with drafting by-laws, doing research are possible tasks, but the ZB wanted to know what other activities were taking place: hence, this gathering.

She noted that participants may not know each other, so introductions were made all around. This revealed a great cross section of town newcomers and old timers, ranges of membership tenure on the boards, as well as a combination of lay and professional expertise. Wonderful! The first discussion item was to identify existing planning documents to be aware of and to use as jumping off points for moving forward.

1.) Inventory of Existing Plans

- Growth Management Plan early 1990's(?) Peg, Ed Kohn, Jane Hovde
- Open Space Survey/Data Collection
- No Master Plan
- Village District zoning designation/ research

Although extensive work on an open space plan and survey was conducted in prior years, it was never submitted/accepted at the State level. Such a document and process are required to be eligible for State grants for open space and recreation activities.

2.) Board Activity Updates/ Current Work

Planning Board

- *Subdivision regulations* are being researched for adoption.

Discussion: Bob said he knows some were adopted in years past, but no record of them being recorded can be found. Jack asked about cluster zoning. Brian said that option is being considered as well, to protect open space in the case of a developer buying a large parcel for multiple residential units. Brian noted that Cluster zoning follows a different approval process from subdivision regs.

- *Town Roads*. Board has been researching the status of town roads. PB sees this as a major development concern. Currently the ownership status of some roads is undetermined (public, private, county, town) and if private development occurs requiring improvements to the roadway, that expense and responsibility/liability could lie with the town.

Conservation Commission

- *Local Wetlands Protection By-law*. The Commission is working on a document that would further regulate local activity to supplement the State Act. They are working with a circuit rider from the Department of Environmental Protection to identify local conditions, such as culvert locations. They are working with the Highway Department as well (and the DEP circuit rider lives in town!)

3.) Technical Assistance Available

There is help for any activity we may undertake. The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission provides 2 days of free assistance to municipalities and often has additional funding. Peg added that the State statute allows for professional expertise to be hired and act on the Town's behalf during a permitting process, which is paid for by the applicants seeking those permits. (This resource was utilized by the ZB for the solar array installation as well as the marijuana cultivation facility.) Area planning programs often look for real studio projects to use as teaching exercises.

Brian also noted that the responsibility for producing Open Space Plans is not assigned to any particular local board/commission in the State Statute. He said that typically, towns create a committee composed of a cross section of membership to oversee the project. The committee would consist of representatives from the relevant town boards/committees and interested citizens with additional experience/ expertise.

4.) Current Development Issues

Members were asked to identify what they see as development issues, potentially positive or negative. Issues noted were as follows:

- Determining the legal status of unmaintained roads and completing the process of their discontinuation or acceptance

- Subdivision Control/Cluster By-law Regulations to prevent loss of open space, protection of natural resources
- Review impacts of outdoor growing and cultivation of marijuana
- Village District- encouragement of commercial activity, business uses
- Demolition Delay By-law to protect historical structures and resources
- General need for housing rehabilitation resources/deteriorating residences
- Buildings Committee/ Town buildings in need of system and energy updates. Stock is deteriorating and resources are limited. (Peter LaPointe reported)
- Energy Committee is working on replacing heating systems in town buildings, improving the building envelopes.
- Need to work with the Town Clerk and Building Inspector/Zoning Enforcement Officer to maximize coordination/ ease for applicants

Additional comments:

- o We need a mechanism to survey residents to gather their input on development issues
- o To be proactive, we need to track the larger parcels, and identify protection strategies while balancing tax revenue concerns
- o Avail ourselves of the decades of work Ed Kohn undertook to protect land and assemble compacts for preservation (Erik has some of Ed's material!)
- o River Road fiasco was a good example of multiple boards needing to coordinate
- o If we do the master planning first, specific work tasks and zoning amendments will emanate from that effort.
- o The need for public education is great. People need to know what to do, where to go, etc. The Zoning Determination Form that was created was to address that, although we are not sure it is being utilized.
- o Too late to introduce anything to Town Meeting for this May but items could be added to a later special Town meeting, i.e. late summer or fall.
- o With Broadband, development pressure may change, but some don't think it will be drastic any time soon (ever?). Other communities closer to larger areas will feel the pressure before we do, i.e. Goshen, Cummington.
- o PVPC could assist us with creation of a Master Plan, the PB would welcome more people involved in that process.
- o Paid professional planning staff for the town would be desirable/not realistic Unless possibly combined with other towns, i.e. circuit rider model

5.) Next Steps

It was agreed that this group would reassemble on Thursday, February 18th at 7:00p.m. to continue the discussion. It was not determined how long this informal group would meet, but the following tasks were assigned to hone the discussion.

- ✓ Real Estate activity over the past several years/ Brian and Judy Cole
- ✓ Building Permit activity over the past several years/ Peg
- ✓ Planning Board will discuss launching a Master Plan planning process

Adjourn/ the meeting concluded at 8:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Peg Keller