

TOWN OF STOW
PLANNING BOARD

Minutes of the March 12, 2024, Planning Board Meeting

Planning Board members present: Lori Clark, Karen Kelleher, Nancy Arsenault, John Colonna-Romano, Margaret Costello, Deb Woods (Voting Associate)

Lori Clark called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

Review of Minutes

Karen Kelleher motioned to approve the minutes of February 6, 2024, as amended.

John Colonna-Romano seconded.

Roll Call Vote: Lori Clark - **Yea**; Karen Kelleher– **Yea**, Nancy Arsenault - **Yea**; John Colonna-Romano - **Yea**, Margaret Costello – **Yea**

Review of Correspondence

John Colonna-Romano said he had watched the link to a presentation from the Commonwealth’s Office of Housing and Livable Communities regarding school enrollment and housing production. Members found the interpretation of the data interesting due to the lack of a relationship between increased housing units and school enrollment. Changes appeared to be more about housing turnover and less about number of units added.

Planning Board Member Updates

John Colonna-Romano mentioned seeing recent news articles in which developers nation-wide have expressed the desire to build smaller, more affordable houses and seen the need for a more diverse housing base. Members briefly talked about rising building costs, home affordability and rental units.

Planning Director’s Report

Comprehensive Plan Update - Valerie Oorthuys noted engagement efforts are underway and that several related links could be found in the packet. She requested that members participate in the online survey and try out the “crowd map” activity. Lori Clark strongly encouraged members to also tell family and friends. She said she hoped members would have time later in the evening, to complete the “meeting in a box” activity together. Valerie Oorthuys also stated that a hybrid meeting on March 18th is planned for the presentation on the existing conditions analysis by the Consultant.

Housing Production Plan – staff are drafting a 5-year housing goals and strategies plan, with assistance from housing consultants at MAPC. A presentation will be made at a hybrid forum on March 27th.

Lower Village Design Guidelines –staff have contracted with Dodson & Flinker, the firm that previously worked with the Planning Board on the bylaw. They will be helping to establish a more technical set of architectural & design standards.

MBTA Communities – information is being gathered on this topic, with more links in the packets and details coming this spring/summer on what Stow’s response could be relative to zoning change by May 2025.

ZBA Updates - Stow Acres Driving Range public hearing closed last night. A decision will come back

before the Zoning Board of Appeals in several weeks. The Board is also continuing to review the Stow Acres Comprehensive permit. Valerie Oorthuys noted that the Planning Board will be reviewing this permit sometime soon to provide feedback to the ZBA.

7:15 PM Public Hearing - Special Permit and Site Plan Approval to allow the inclusion of artist spaces and gun manufacturer spaces, 501 Gleasondale Road (Gleasondale Mill)

Present: Scott Hayes, Foresite Engineering

Lori Clark opened the public hearing and provided an overview of the process.

Deb Woods asked about the Applicant's unpaid taxes. Valerie Oorthuys stated that back taxes had not been paid and noted that the Town had recently approved a mechanism to give the Applicant an opportunity to come up with a payment plan after holding a public hearing through the Select Board. The hearing would first need to be noticed, but if a payment plan was agreed to, the Special Permit could be issued. If the Planning Board does not choose this option, the unpaid taxes would come up again for the Applicant at the time of building permit issuance. The Planning Director noted that it was not recommended that the Board deny the permit due to nonpayment before holding a public hearing. The Board could condition the Special Permit to limit expansion of the site until all back taxes are paid. Valerie Oorthuys confirmed that tax collection proceedings are underway, as stated in the letter included in the packet.

Margaret Costello noted concerns regarding brownfield remediation, as there are contaminants in the soils at the Gleasondale Mill. Valerie Oorthuys said this topic could be discussed as part of the public hearing and if the Board chose to close the public hearing, information gathered could be worked into the decision.

Scott Hayes presented a Site Plan to the Board. Existing conditions were identified by compiling historical documents and dig safe was used to mark underground utilities. Deeds from the registry were researched and a review was made of a recent taking by MassDOT for bridge reconstruction. Scott Hayes identified access points to loading docks, building entrances/egresses, traffic choke points around the property, the locations of dumpsters and hydrants, distances found between mill buildings and the river, the canal, parking areas, grading, storage, and outbuildings.

Scott Hayes spoke about the substantial size of the mill buildings. He noted a table of floor areas which he had created, listing current tenants, uses, and square footage of leased spaces. He stated the primary use is woodworking, with other commercial services peppered throughout including: a print shop, a stage prop manufacturing company, a book seller, a sheet metal fabricator, and several machine shops for tools and/or electronics. Lastly, he referenced suggestions for improved circulation, emergency access, lighting, vehicular maneuverability and parking. He offered to take any questions relative to the site plan. It was noted that the applicant, Chris Franklin, was unable to attend the meeting.

Planning Board Comments

John Colonna-Romano noted a concern for a dumpster location in close proximity to the Assabet River. He asked what would be done to prevent an accidental spill, or contaminants from the dumpster from entering into the river. Scott Hayes said relocating the dumpster was not out of the question, but noted that water flow is very close, relative to the entire length of the building, just about everywhere on the site.

Lori Clark reframed the question by asking why the dumpster had been located there in the first place. Scott Hayes answered convenience, ease for moving vehicles, it was out of the way, and didn't appear to obstruct building access. He approximated the distance to the river from the back of the building is 15 ft.

Deb Woods asked how close the dumpsters would be to homes across the River. She noted her concern was less about sightline, and more about noise. Scott Hayes agreed that noise from emptying the dumpsters could carry over the water. He approximated the distance to the homes to be between 120 to 150 ft.

Karen Kelleher noted the lack of a formal parking plan for tenants. Members agreed that until tenancy information is provided by the applicant, this is beyond the scope of the Engineer's plan.

Nancy Arsenault raised a concern regarding areas of Brownfield remediation. Valerie Oorthuys suggested location details, relative to PFAS contamination, could be researched through MA DEP's online data collection.

Deb Woods asked about the contractor's yard shown on the plan. The Engineer said this was part of the existing conditions. He said he had several photos and offered to forward these to the Board. Valerie Oorthuys said aerial review indicates that the use is relatively new. Members questioned the timing of the creation of the contractor's yard area. The Engineer said the Board should engage in a conversation with applicant and tenant.

Lori Clark noted a majority of the information the Board had asked for was not provided. Members had a site plan and square foot utilized had been attempted. Still unknown: the description of primary activities for each business type, secondary activities, current (or proposed) hours of operation, and anticipated events (and frequency), signage, lighting and traffic impacts. The applicant had been told, at the last continuance, that tonight was the final chance for a public hearing. He was given the option to withdraw the application, but he had not taken the opportunity.

Lori Clark asked to hear from members about how the Board should proceed. Frustration at the lack of information and slow progress of the applicant was expressed by all members. With regard to the site plan, members also reiterated concerns for negative impact potential of the dumpster location, a contractor's yard, and unmitigated Brownfield areas.

Scott Hayes asked for procedural guidance. Valerie Oorthuys confirmed that closing the public hearing would prevent the applicant from withdrawing. A decision would need to be rendered, the outcome of which would determine the next steps and timeframe of the applicant.

Public Input

Lori Clark confirmed for Rumel Mahmood, 32 Peabody Drive, that the Planning Board will be given the chance at this May's Town Meeting to report on progress on the action of enacting a bylaw in Stow relative to the topic of locating Firearms Businesses in Stow.

Laurel Cohen, 481 Gleasondale Road, commented that the drinking water situation at the Mill and Mass DEP's involvement within the neighborhood was ongoing and noted the contractor's yard. She asked if the applicant would have the chance to reapply if the Board closed the public hearing. Lori Clark replied that a decision rendered by the Board, with or without prejudice, could not prevent the applicant from reapplying, but it could alter his timeframe.

John Colonna-Romano motioned to close the Public Hearing for Special Permit and Site Plan Approval at 501 Gleasondale Road (Gleasondale Mill).

Margaret Costello seconded.

Roll Call Vote: Lori Clark - **Yea**; Nancy Arsenault - **Yea**; John Colonna-Romano - **Yea**, Margaret Costello – **Yea**, Deb Woods - **Yea**

8:15 PM Public Hearing: Modification of a Contractor’s Yard Special Permit, Erosion Control Special Permit, and Earth Removal Special Permit and Site Plan Approval, 63-65 White Pond Road.

Lori Clark stated that the Applicant requested a continuance without testimony to April 16, 2024.

Margaret Costello motioned to continue the Public Hearing for Modification of a Contractor’s Yard Special Permit, Erosion Control Special Permit, and Earth Removal Special Permit and Site Plan Approval, 63-65 White Pond Road to April 16, 2024, at 7:15PM, without testimony.

John Colonna-Romano seconded.

Roll Call Vote: Lori Clark - **Yea**; Nancy Arsenault - **Yea**; John Colonna-Romano - **Yea**, Margaret Costello – **Yea**, Deb Woods - **Yea**

Review of Stow House of Pizza Mitigation

Present: Rich Harrington, Dillis & Roy

The Planning Board reviewed a letter from the Board’s engineering peer reviewer Sue Carter at Places Associates, Inc. Karen Kelleher expressed a concern about drainage. Valerie Oorthuys said Sue Carter felt that slope stabilization would be covered under item #2 of the letter, however drainage calculations were not provided, as future runoff concerns fall under the responsibility of the applicant, when and if the Applicant proposes to regrade the fill.

John Colonna-Romano confirmed from Rich Harrington that a public records review had uncovered an expired site plan from 2005. This document had been included, only as a reference, to show proposed plantings, approved by the previous Planning Board, as landscape screening to abutters.

Rich Harrington shared his screen and described for members how the site plan would be updated in alignment with the letter from Places Associates.

Lori Clark asked members if the Board should approve the interim site plan. She cautioned that this did not mean the conditions of the decision can be waived. She reiterated to the Engineer that if the applicant did not want to comply with the conditions of the original decision, a formal request for removal would need to be made. Members expressed concern for a phased approach.

John Colonna-Romano noted a comment in the letter regarding the planting of Juniper trees a close distance to existing Apple Orchards. Richard Harrington agreed to make a change.

Karen Kelleher noted no disagreement to any of the items. She asked the Board about fill and testing. If there had ever been a requirement to test the fill, members could not recall. Research into the decision would need to be made.

Members briefly talked about Places Associates comments regarding the arborvitae plantings. John Colonna-Romano made an additional suggestion to stagger the plantings.

Lori Clark brought the discussion to a close, by asking the Engineer to clarify with the Applicant the requests of the interim. John Colonna-Romano agreed and reiterated that members need to know the difference between the interim and what is actually in the decision, if the Board wants to move forward.

Lori Clark added that she would like to understand what the Engineer thinks will come in a second phase, and what he thinks is dependent on outdoor dining.

Rich Harrington agreed to come back before the Board, with more details before proceeding with efforts on the ground.

Valerie Oorthuys asked members if they would like to provide feedback ahead of the Select Board's license renewal discussion of Stow House of Pizza, on March 25th. Several members noted that a small amount of positive progress could be reported, but the Select Board should be encouraged to continue with a license that was temporary in nature.

Review Annual Town Meeting Articles

Valerie Oorthuys noted zoning articles, funding requests and a couple of additional items to be brought to Annual Town Meeting. The warrant closes April 1st, with a meeting with Capitol Planning later this week. Funding is still needed for the remainder of the Comprehensive Plan process, Engineering funding under the Master Plan Account and funding for Construction Administration for the Crescent Street Sidewalks Project. The following requests were discussed:

- The Planning Board agreed to ask MART to continue the GO! Stow Program under their existing grant rather than to request funding through Town Meeting.
- A MassWorks grant for the Hudson Road & Great Road Intersection Project will be applied for again in June '24, however the Board agreed not to ask Town Meeting for additional matching funds.
- An item on the proposed FY25 5 Year Capital Plan for funds to progress the Town Center Streetscape Project from concept plans through to the 25% design phase was agreed to be pushed to FY26.

Town Center Streetscape Project

Valerie Oorthuys outlined the project and said she will prepare a memo to solicit member feedback, to be reviewed at an upcoming meeting.

Review Draft Memo to Select Board on Planning Board Work Plan

Members agreed to edits as discussed.

Public Input Continued

Kelly Lawlor, 170 Hudson Road, said she was disappointed to hear about a delay to the Hudson Road and Great Road Intersection Project. She thanked the Planning Board for their advocacy and for continuing to make the project a priority. She also offered to conduct a Meeting in a Box for the Comprehensive Plan and was talked through next steps.

Comprehensive Plan: Meeting in a Box

Valerie Oorthuys gave details about the activity and where to find it online. Planning Board members were encouraged to review the materials ahead of next week's meeting.

Adjournment

Margaret Costello motioned to adjourn.

John Colonna-Romano seconded.

Roll Call Vote: Lori Clark - **Yea**; Deb Woods- **Yea**; John Colonna-Romano – **Yea** Karen Kelleher,
Margaret Costello -**Yea**.

Respectfully Submitted,

Julie Windzio