



Town of Stow
PLANNING BOARD

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April 21, 2023

Leigh Hildebrandt
196 Great Road
Stow, MA 01775

Dear Ms. Hildebrandt,

The Planning Board has received your email dated April 8, 2023 and would like to offer the responses below. Please note that some of these questions are addressed through the Frequently Asked Questions document, attached to this letter.

1. What do you believe are the top 3 reasons for these changes? Why now?

Please refer to the FAQ sheet.

2. I've heard members of the Board use the word "flexibility" numerous times, what changes are you considering to increase flexibility for Business owners?

Please refer to the FAQ sheet.

3. Some of the bylaws, like underground utilities, come with some hefty price tags. Won't that deter small business owners?

Underground utilities would be installed by the developer or property owner. The bylaw seeks to balance interests between residents of Stow and property owners – we feel it is appropriate to request underground utilities in the Business District as we do for developers of subdivisions.

4. I've heard you say that it's important to get these bylaws in place before getting water, can you elaborate on why?

Please refer to the FAQ sheet.

5. Many of the changes appear to be directed to big property developers coming in, not small businesses. Is that intentional?

The proposed zoning bylaw does have more implications for property owners rather than businesses themselves, as the bylaw includes design standards which would alter the physical appearance of Lower Village. However, small business owners will benefit from the additional allowed uses, the increased number of tenant spaces, and the inclusion of apartments above retail shops, driving foot traffic to the district.

6. Are there any changes that help small businesses? Which ones?

See above.

7. If the goal is to bring in developers who would rent out units to small businesses, how does that address the smaller parcels that exist in the LVBD on the southside of Great Road?

All parcels within the Lower Village Business District will be subject to the proposed bylaw. It is true that owners of larger parcels have more options, as they have more land.

8. Is there a goal to have small parcels bought by the same owners in order to eliminate the small parcels?

This is not a specific goal of the bylaw.

9. I recognize that the proposed bylaws are being made with the long term in mind, but will they help with redevelopment now?

Please refer to the FAQ sheet.

10. How will the new bylaws help the vacant properties on the south side of Great Road like the former gas station, gun shop, and bank?

Please refer to the FAQ sheet.

11. How do they help with resolving the vacant storefronts at Linear?

Please refer to the FAQ sheet.

12. Will they help with getting current business owners to fix up their properties?

The proposed bylaw incentivizes development, requiring a public hearing process. Through that process, the Board may discuss items specific to that site including any need for 'fix up'.

Enforcement of Special Permits will continue as typically done.

13. The Lower Village Business District has a major roadway cutting through it. How will having more businesses, outdoor activities, and mixed use housing impact travel on Great Road?

Please refer to the FAQ sheet.

14. How will pedestrians cross Great Road, especially when there is more vehicular traffic?

Please refer to the FAQ sheet. A note that Great Road includes crosswalks and pedestrian refuge islands.

15. How will more traffic impact the rural character of Stow? Will Stow even look like a rural town anymore?

The proposed bylaw is intended to enhance the rural character of Stow by creating a village center for retail needs.

16. If new/redeveloped businesses are closer to the road and parking is next to or behind the businesses but that's also where loading entrances will be, how will that work?

There are numerous examples of how businesses manage trucking and consumer parking in a safe and convenient manner. For a few local examples, please refer to West Acton Village, Maynard Center, or the shops at 29 Hudson Road in Sudbury.

17. How will more delivery trucks impact traffic flow on Great Road and within the parking lots?

Please refer to the FAQ sheet.

18. To ensure pedestrian safety, will deliveries need to be made before or after businesses are open?

Traffic and delivery questions are important items that would be discussed on a site by site basis through the public hearing process.

19. If delivery times change to before/after hours, how would that impact residential abutters?

See above.

20. How will bylaws impact the vendors making deliveries?

The proposed bylaw does not include any specifics related to deliveries. This would be discussed through the public hearing process.

21. Are the lots on the south side of Great Rd big enough for delivery trucks to drive around to the sides and/or back to be able to back into loading areas and turn around without presenting risks to pedestrians and parked vehicles?

As part of a Special Permit application, any changes made to the layout of the sites would be presented and internal traffic circulation including truck turns would need to be shown.

22. In 3.3.5.25 INTERNAL ACCESS DRIVES sub-section h, " Sidewalks which meet the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board design standards shall be installed along both sides of INTERNAL ACCESS DRIVES." and in 3.3.5.27 Pedestrian Access to BUILDINGS, " Sidewalks and/or walkways along a BUILDING façade shall be at least ten (10) feet wide". If the front facade of a building faces the access road and sidewalks are on both sides of access streets, couldn't that mean that there would be 20 feet that are sidewalks alone?

The quoted sentence continues to say, "The Planning Board may alter this requirement where the addition of landscaping or functional open space offers improved streetscape design". The intent of having wider sidewalks at building facades is to allow greater room for pedestrians to maneuver around the entrance to storefronts as the bylaw also describes additional activities which may locate on the sidewalk: "outdoor restaurant and café seating, merchandise displays, planters, trash receptacles, and sandwich board signs placed on the sidewalk shall leave a pathway along the sidewalk of at least four feet that is free of obstruction". A good example of a wider sidewalk that includes space to sit and gather is West Acton Villageworks at 525 Mass Ave in Acton.

23. For small properties, doesn't that mean that the 10' front sidewalk could become the only functional space? How would that serve as space for civic engagement?

See the above answer- the Planning Board is allowing additional activities to locate on sidewalks, so long as a 4 foot wide walkway is maintained.

24. Has anyone actually tried mapping out all of the road, sidewalk, and functional space dimensions for existing parcels, especially the smaller ones?

We have not created hypothetical site plans for each parcel. Our consultants have confirmed the feasibility of the bylaw in part by mapping out hypothetical space needs at parcels on the north and south of Great Road. It is true that more can be done with larger parcels (more is more!) though the bylaw allows the Planning Board and property owners to consider the unique space constraints of smaller parcels.

25. The Lower Village Business District does not currently have the infrastructure to support the current business, let alone growth. Getting water and sewage treatment will take several years and cost several millions of dollars. The Planning Board has stated that they want the

bylaws to be in place before getting water. What if the LVBD cannot get water or sewage treatment?

Please refer to the FAQ sheet.

26. If Town water and sewage treatment are not possible, what kind of development can happen?

Please refer to the FAQ sheet.

27. How will business growth impact the current residents and businesses' competition for current resources?

Without public water or sewer infrastructure, there is a natural limit to growth in the Lower Village Business District.

28. If the Town can get water and sewer for the LVBD, will it only be for the businesses?

The Town has contracted with a consultant to undertake a public water feasibility study to complete work associated with groundwater exploration and feasibility of establishing a Public Water Supply to service the Lower Village Business District. From this study, the Town will receive results of a test well program and a summary of water system development options.

29. Will Stow residents have to pay higher taxes or will the costs be paid by the businesses?

See above – no decisions have been made as we are still in an exploratory phase.

30. If the Board is aware of a plan to get water, when will that information be shared with the residents of the town? Shouldn't the residents know what those chances are before voting on changing LVBD bylaw?

Please see above- there is no pending plan to get water as the feasibility study is not complete and those results would need to be reviewed.

31. As the new bylaws stand now, they seem to assume that water and sewerage will happen. If there is no public water or sewerage coming in the near future, will the new bylaws be amended again with the lack of water and sewerage in mind?

As we've been advised by consultants, the proposed bylaw is intended to function in both scenarios, with or without water. That said, zoning is not set in stone and this bylaw (as all others) may be reviewed from time to time to ensure the evolving needs of the Town are considered.

32. At the first Public Forum, it was stated that the intent of mixed use is to not have free standing residential structures within the Business District, but have them be part of the business structures. If mixed use will not be free-standing structures, then why are so many freestanding single-family homes and condominiums included in the new Lower Village Business District?

This is correct, the Board is not inclined to introduce additional free standing residences in the Lower Village Business District. Each single family home or condo within the Business District will be grandfathered in. The boundaries of the district are not changing, other than to rectify split zoned lots. The proposed bylaw introduces new buffers between business uses and preexisting residential uses to offer greater protection to current residents of Lower Village.

33. Why are the condos at Faxon Farm and Meetinghouse not in an Active Adult Neighborhood overlay like other AAN in Stow?

Faxon Farm and Meetinghouse at Stow is not an Active Adult Neighborhood, but an Independent Adult Residence, a use only allowed in the Business District.

- 34. The document mentions green infrastructure. What measures in the bylaw actually support being green, besides managing stormwater and allowing solar panels?**
Please refer to the FAQ sheet.

- 35. What measures have been considered in regards to water conservation and water preservation?**
Please refer to the FAQ sheet. This is included in stormwater management and the specifics will be considered through the Special Permit process.

- 36. Was any consideration given in regards to permeable surfaces? There is only one mention of paved surfaces and no mention of permeable surfaces.**
Yes, property owners may propose permeable surfaces.

- 37. While there is encouragement to use native species of plants, there is no language about using organic practices, especially in regards to plant maintenance to reduce the impact to the environment caused by fertilizer and pesticides.**
This language is typically included in the Special Permit itself, rather than in the zoning bylaw language.

- 38. At the 2nd Public Forum, Valerie mentioned being close to the Assabet, orchards, and Conservation areas as they relate to "sense of place," but the Assabet and the Conservation areas are not direct abutters to most of the LVBD, so how would increased development in the LVBD add to "sense of place," when you can't see or access those places on foot from the LVBD?**
These places are accessible by foot or bike from Lower Village. Town Forest and the Red Acre Woodlands are directly adjacent, with the Assabet River just down White Pond Road- just a few minutes on a bike! The comments related to a sense of place are also intended to show that our primary business district should be reflective of areas across Town that represent the culture of Stow, such as our apple orchards, farms, and historic neighborhoods.

- 39. What makes Stow appealing to most residents is that it's a semi-rural, undeveloped town. Folks move to Stow and stay here because it's out in the country where they can live alongside nature. Isn't business and mixed-use development in direct opposition to that?**
The bylaw was created with robust resident feedback on what they wish Lower Village to develop into. By revitalizing Lower Village and concentrating business uses in Lower Village, we are able to create a retail environment attractive both to our residents and to the business community. We have heard the call from residents that while we need to protect our open spaces and maintain our recreational opportunities, we also need place in town to meet friends for dinner, for example.

- 40. In section [3.3.5.6](#), what does "authentic" mean in this statement, " Despite this preference, BUILDINGS in the LVBD are not required to appear historic, but rather respectful of historic traditions, while remaining functional and authentic?" It sounds like a buzzword in this context.**
The bylaw has been reviewed by consultants at Dodson & Flinker, who are exceptionally skilled in landscape and architectural design. They have worked with us to ensure the language in the bylaw tells property owners and developers the architectural styles preferred. The Planning Board will continue to work with consultants to prepare Design Guidelines, which will further support the bylaw.

41. In a time where natural resources are becoming more scarce and town services more costly, what makes developing LVBD appealing when it will cause more competition for those resources and services?

The proposed bylaw does not require development and the Board recognizes that we cannot control the market. This is about exercising control over how any potential future development affects the Town and your experience and enjoyment of it.

42. Have other locations in Stow been considered for business development?

The Planning Board is proposing additional flexibility and options in Lower Village in part to guide and direct infill development so that Stow residents can get the most out of the land already zoned for business use. Tacking on additional areas in town for businesses would work against the sustainability considerations that have gone into this planning practice, as that would encourage sprawl.

43. Is the growth sustainable?

The footprint of the Lower Village Business District is not expanding and its boundaries offer limits to growth. This bylaw allows more to be done within the current real estate in the district. The Board feels that the growth allowed through the bylaw is appropriately scaled to Stow and may be reviewed in the future as the vision is realized.

44. At what point does development or redevelopment become over-development?

The growth allowed through the proposed bylaw provides the vision of Lower Village that we have heard support for from residents over the decades.

45. If rooftop gardens are allowed, what will screen abutting residential neighbors from view of the occupants, especially if buildings are 3 stories high?

The bylaw does allow rooftop gardens. The Planning Board may determine through the Special Permit process what type of screening may be needed on a case-by-case basis.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your questions regarding the proposed Lower Village Business District zoning bylaw.

Sincerely,

Lori Clark - Chair