

Town of Stow
Gleasondale Neighborhood Area Subcommittee of the Stow Planning Board
(hereafter referred to as “Gleasondale Subcommittee”)

Minutes of the January 25, 2018 meeting of the Gleasondale Subcommittee

Gleasondale Subcommittee members present

Laurel Cohen, Meg Costello, Jeri DiPietro, Rosemary Monahan, and Dot Spaulding (Dot present from 7-7:40 pm)

Gleasondale Subcommittee members absent

None

Stow Planning Department staff present

Jesse Steadman and Valerie Oorthuys

Rosemary Monahan called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

Minutes from previous meeting

Minutes from the November 27, 2017 meeting were unanimously approved.

Public Comment

None

Member updates

None

Demolition Delays

At our November 2017 meeting, the Subcommittee decided to explore the potential for a Demolition Delay that would apply town-wide, not just to Gleasondale. To that end the Subcommittee investigated demolition delay bylaws in other nearby communities. The following information was obtained:

Dot Spaulding investigated demo delay bylaws in Littleton, Maynard, and Berlin. Both Maynard and Littleton have 6 month delays. Maynard’s applies to historically significant buildings, and in Berlin it applies to buildings more than 100 years old. Maynard adopted their bylaw last year. Littleton hasn’t yet been able to use their bylaw to preserve any buildings. Like Maynard, Berlin’s bylaw is new and it didn’t appear that they had yet preserved buildings from demolition.

Laurel Cohen found on-line a copy of the Massachusetts Historical Commission’s Sample Demolition Delay bylaw, which she distributed to the Subcommittee. She also investi-

gate bylaws in Worcester and Hudson. Hudson doesn't appear to have a standalone demo delay bylaw, but instead it is addressed briefly in their historic district bylaw, so any delay would only apply to buildings in that district. Worcester has a bylaw, and has a set of successes and some failures in using it. It is a 1 year delay for buildings in the MACRIS database, and a 45 day delay if the building is found not to be historically significant. They do have a waiver application for hardship situations. One of Worcester's more recent successes was the Central Building on Main Street, which has been converted from offices into a 55-unit residential building with commercial businesses on the street level. Another success was the Stearns Tavern which was relocated to a park and a foundation will occupy part of the building. One current failure is the Notre Dame church, which will be demolished when the one year period is up, since no developer or buyer was found to save the building. Bill Byron noted that Worcester's successes have been with commercial buildings, whereas most of the historic structures in Stow are private homes.

Jeri DiPietro investigated bylaws in Acton, Groton, and Shirley. She found that Acton has a 12 month delay, which in some circumstances can be up to 18 months. It applies to buildings at least 100 years old (*Jeri, is that right?*) and also buildings on the National Historic Register. They don't appear to have a hardship provision. There was an example of a home on High Street that the Historic Commission had hoped to save, but the building was not in good shape and ultimately was demolished and replaced by a 12 unit residential project. They have had at least one success with a demo delay. Shirley has had a 6 month demo delay bylaw since 1998. The Hazen Davis barn was saved by being dismantled and taken to Martha's Vineyard where it houses a museum. Groton has had a 6 month delay since 2006. The Groton Inn was badly damaged by fire a few years ago, and there was an effort to delay demolition, but the damage was too great, although they were able to save some of the artwork, which will be used in the new inn, which is scheduled to open this spring.

Rosemary Monahan investigated bylaws in Northborough and Southborough. Southborough's is relatively new, having only been adopted in 2015. It applies to buildings older than 1925 and any that on the town's historic buildings survey. It is a 9 month delay for buildings that the Historical Commission finds to be preferentially preserved. One success is the preservation of the Burnett House, which the town used Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds to purchase a restriction on. This 13 bedroom former mansion will be transformed into a bed and breakfast. Northborough adopted their demo delay bylaw in 1979. It hadn't been used much until about 10 years ago. The town tried to extend the delay from 6 months to 1 year, but that failed at Town Meeting in 2014. It applies to buildings older than 100 years or on the town's inventory of historic properties. A representative of the Northborough Historic Commission provided a lot of information about how they've used the delay and how it's worked. He said that there are 3 developers in town who have done a good job incorporating historic build-

ings into their projects. He said that although the demo delay has been useful, its applicability is limited since not that many historic buildings are proposed for demolition, and he feels that a more useful tool for historic preservation is their Local Historic District.

Jesse Steadman then commented on whether it might make to pursue a demo delay in Stow. Since it would likely be a town-wide delay, he and Valerie Oorthuys would want to think through with our Subcommittee how to approach the Planning Board about this idea. A demo delay is likely to be seen more as a 'stick' than a 'carrot.' He noted that there are other possible zoning approaches, such as adaptive reuse bylaws, which could provide incentives of interest to property owners (e.g., allowing an 'in-law' apartment in a reused building that wouldn't normally be allowed under zoning.). Jess also noted that if we pursued a demo delay bylaw, we would want to do proactive outreach to developers active in Stow. Valerie Oorthuys asked how members of the Subcommittee feel about demo delays after having done this research.

Members of the Subcommittee expressed mixed feelings about demo delays as well as other tools such as local historic districts. There is interest in encouraging property owners in Gleasondale to keep up or improve their properties without making it harder for them to comply with local regulations. There was also a question about whether a demo delay bylaw would need to be town-wide. Some felt that pursuing National Register status isn't worth the investment of time since it doesn't provide any protection for buildings on the register.

Then the discussion focused on identifying our goal - we need to articulate what exactly it is that we are trying to preserve in Gleasondale. Bill Byron said that he thinks we're trying to preserve mill village character, and Meg said that we might be able to achieve that through a customized local historic district. To assist us with the goals discussion at the next meeting, we decided to take a closer look at local historic district bylaws in other towns, to see what they have done. Jesse noted that the mill had recently sold, and that our Subcommittee might want to invite the new owner to a future meeting.

Before the next Subcommittee meeting, we will investigate Local Historic District bylaws (if any) in the following towns:

Dot Spaulding - Berlin

Meg Costello - Maynard

Laurel Cohen - Hudson and Worcester

Jeri DiPietro - Acton, Groton, Shirley

Rosemary Monahan - Littleton, Northborough, Southborough

Note - our previous research showed that there are local historic districts in Clinton, Harvard, Grafton, and Lancaster. If anyone has time, let's investigate those as well.

Our research will focus on:

- When was the bylaw adopted?
- How did the community build public support?
- What exactly is regulated under the bylaw?
- What is the process used to regulate? Does the town's Historical Commission serve as the regulatory authority or is there a separate entity?

Jesse Steadman said that he would identify pros and cons of different approaches to neighborhood preservation. Valerie Oorthuys said that she would contact Chris Skelly about local historic district bylaws that might be particularly applicable to Stow.

Next Meeting:

The Subcommittee did not set a date for the next meeting, but the agenda will focus on a discussion of the goal we are trying to accomplish, and on our research into local historic district bylaws that other towns have adopted.

Meeting adjourned, 8:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Rosemary Monahan