

MINUTES

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

Minutes of the March 22, 2018 meeting of the Gleasondale Subcommittee

Gleasondale Subcommittee members present

Laurel Cohen, Meg Costello, Rosemary Monahan, and Dot Spaulding

Gleasondale Subcommittee members absent

Jeri DiPietro,

Stow Planning Department staff present

Jesse Steadman and Valerie Oorthuys

Rosemary Monahan called the meeting to order at 7:05 pm.

Minutes from previous meeting

Minutes from the January 25, 2018 meeting were unanimously approved.

Public Comment

We had three members of the public present for all or part of the meeting, including Bill Byron, and an Eagle Scout and his father. The scout said that he is doing a project for a badge, and wanted to sit in on our meeting.

Local Historic Bylaws

Members of the Subcommittee reviewed the results of their research on bylaws in other Massachusetts towns. These included the communities of: Acton, Groton, & Shirley (researched by Jeri); Hudson, Worcester, and Clinton (researched by Laurel); Grafton (researched by Dot); Northborough, Southborough, Lancaster, & Lexington (researched by Rosemary); and Billerica & Hopkinton (recommended to Valerie by Chris Skelly of the Massachusetts Historical Commission). Not all of these communities had established Local Historic Districts, but some used other methods to encourage preservation of neighborhood character.

This was followed by a discussion of what the Subcommittee wants to achieve, with a focus on preserving the character of the mill village, complete with a diversity of housing types, from workers’ housing to mill owners’ housing, and the mill itself. It was noted that when John Mullin led the Gleasondale mill charrette a few years ago, he commented that this may be the most intact mill village in the state.

There was general agreement that we would not propose anything that is overly burdensome, and would provide a hardship exemption process. We want to encourage property owners to keep up and improve their properties, in keeping with

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the character of the neighborhood. There continued to be interest in mechanisms other than Local Historic District(s), such as demolition delays and National Historic Register designation, and in providing design assistance to property owners seeking to improve their properties. There also was concern that guidelines and other voluntary measures may not be enough to prevent changes out of character and scale with the neighborhood. As Jesse said, the challenge will be in finding a solution that would balance making improvements easy (including a hardship process) versus making the requirements (if any) count. It was agreed that we should focus on major additions to buildings and new buildings, and not on more minor changes.

Options for Neighborhood Preservation

Jesse and Valerie distributed a table they had compiled on different preservation methods, and their requirements/considerations and the process for adoption by the town. The methods included: Local Historic Districts; National Historic Districts; Neighborhood Conservation Districts/Architectural Preservation Districts; Demolition Delays; Adaptive Reuse/Mill Conversion Bylaw (and Flexible Dimension Zoning, Accessory Apartments, and UpZoning); Design Review Districts; and Village Center Zoning. There was a discussion of these methods and some of the pros and cons.

Jesse said that if the Subcommittee wants to pursue one of these methods, we should meet first with the Planning Board, and if they are supportive, then present at a joint Boards meeting.

It was decided that the next step would be for our Subcommittee to look through the Gleasondale section of the recently-completed historic homes inventory to help us refine what it is that is important to protecting neighborhood character. Jesse said that the Planning Department could scan that material and distribute to the Subcommittee before the next meeting. He also said that he would look into a document on the mechanics of how a design review process could work.

Stow Historic Commission

Dot noted that the Stow Historic Commission is interested in our deliberations and would like to meet with us to discuss issues of mutual interest. We decided it makes sense to do that after our next Subcommittee meeting.

Next meeting

The next Subcommittee meeting will take place on Thursday, April 19 at 7pm.