

TOWN OF STOW
PLANNING BOARD

Minutes of the August 25, 2020 Planning Board Meeting

Planning Board Members Present: Lori Clark, Margaret Costello, Karen Kelleher, Len Golder, John Colonna-Romano

Voting Associate Member: Mark Jones

Lori Clark called the meeting to order at 6:30pm.

Discussion of Meeting Minutes

Minutes of August 11, 2020

Karen Kelleher moved to approve the minutes as amended.

Margaret Costello seconded.

Roll Call Vote: Lori Clark- Yea; Karen Kelleher- Yea; John Colonna-Romano-Yea, Margaret Costello- Yea, Len Golder- Yea.

Planner's Report

Joanne Drive Subdivision

Jesse Steadman updated the Board on the intention of Kendall homes to purchase the Joanne Drive Subdivision, reporting that it appears the new developer will maintain all aspects of the approved plan.

Lower Village Zoning Updates

Jesse Steadman indicated that with the Lower Village zoning effort now underway, staff will be drafting a letter and other outreach to notify Lower Village residents and businesses, as well as the broader public.

Gleasondale Road Pole Location

Jesse Steadman said he and Valerie Oorthuys reviewed the Joint Pole Location Petition for Gleasondale Road and has drafted a memo to the Board of Selectmen indicating that the location is unacceptable due to the constraints of the home it will be situated in front of.

Lower Village Traffic Safety Improvements

Jesse Steadman reported that the Highway Department has begun procuring supplies for the upgrade to the underground infiltration system under Lower Common. Steadman indicated that he will be working with Highway to resolve the drainage issues at 92 Great Road as well as the work remaining at 196 Great Road.

Decision deliberation for Modification of Erosion Control Special Permit and Application for Earth Removal Special Permit, 79 Edgehill Road

Present:

Bill and Martha Chiarchiaro, Applicants

The Planning Board reviewed a draft decision for the Earth Removal Special Permit and modification to the Erosion Control Special Permit and Site Plan Approval. The Board clarified language in the decision related to trucking routes and signage for both trucks and vehicle traffic.

Karen Kelleher moved to approve the amended decision for the modification of the Erosion Control Special Permit and Application for an Earth Removal Special Permit at 79 Edgehill Road.

Margaret Costello Seconded.

Roll Call Vote: Lori Clark- Yea; Margaret Costello- Yea; Karen Kelleher- Yea; John Colonna-Romano-Yea; Len Golder- Yea.

Request for Minor Modification of Erosion Control Special Permit, Collings Foundation

Present:

Bob Collings, Applicant

Karen Kelleher recused herself as an abutter to the Collings Foundation.

Bob Collings said he would prefer to spread loam rather than the engineered top soil as described in the existing Special Permit. Bob Collings said the purpose of the request is a consideration of time, as the engineered top soil would need to sit undisturbed on site for a period of time before further seeding and planting, which could delay the project until the spring. Bob Collings said the Conservation Commission has approved the request for the land area under their jurisdiction.

John Colonna-Romano asked if the loam would come from what is already on site, noting that the Board's consulting engineer at Places Associates was concerned with the quality of the loam. Bob Collings said it would, though only 20-25% of the total quantity needed is on site. The loam could be spread around the site and mixed in with new material to improve its quality.

The Board discussed whether the request constitutes a minor modification, agreeing that it does not impact the final condition of the area nor increase truck traffic to the site.

Len Golder moved to declare the request a minor modification.

John Colonna-Romano seconded.

Roll Call Vote: Lori Clark- Yea; Margaret Costello- Yea; John Colonna-Romano-Yea; Len Golder- Yea; Karen Kelleher abstained.

Jesse Steadman said the landscaping plan is unchanged from April 2019. Lori Clark said the existing Special Permit requires additional plantings, though the applicant resubmitted the original plan.

Bob Collings said he is revisiting the original plan because the FAA requires flight paths to be cleared, and he prefers mowing to cutting back landscaping. Bob Collings asked for further information from the Board related to plantings. Lori Clark said the existing Special Permit describes clusters of plantings around the perimeter of the excavated area in order to replicate the habitat's condition prior to excavation.

The Board reviewed language in a draft decision that describes the need for a landscaping plan to be submitted, noting that Section 7.14 of the existing decision states the proposed landscaping is inadequate. The Board agreed that they are still waiting for submission of an appropriate landscaping plan. Bob Collings agreed to modify the plan. The Board discussed a threshold for when the revised plan needs to be received.

John Colonna-Romano moved to approve the decision as amended for the minor modification limited to replace of the Erosion Control Special Permit for the Collings Foundation.

Len Golder seconded.

Roll Call Vote: Lori Clark- Yea; Margaret Costello- Yea; John Colonna-Romano-Yea; Len Golder- Yea; Mark Jones (Voting Associate Member)- Yea; Karen Kelleher abstained.

**Lower Village Zoning Effort, with Representatives from Dodson & Flinker
Joint Boards Meeting with Economic Development and Industrial Commission (EDIC) and
Lower Village Revitalization Subcommittee (LVRC)**

Present

Peter Flinker, Dodson & Flinker

Bob Mitchell, Bob Mitchell Consulting

Judi Barrett, Barrett Planning Group, LLC

Tom Farnsworth, Lower Village Revitalization Subcommittee (LVRC) and Economic Development and Industrial Commission (EDIC)

Jonathan Bransfield, Lower Village Revitalization Subcommittee (LVRC)

Bob Collings, Economic Development and Industrial Commission (EDIC)

Jesse Steadman introduced the Lower Village rezoning effort, stating that a team of consultants, including Peter Flinker, Bob Mitchell, and Judi Barrett, has been selected to provide the Town with a zoning strategy for the Lower Village Business District. Their work will build off of previous planning efforts and incorporate the Board's current goals for the district as well as resident's stated concerns for improvements.

Peter Flinker stated that after this kick-off meeting, the consulting team will review multiple approaches to zoning to present at a zoning strategies workshop. From there, a third public meeting will include a presentation of a final recommended strategy. Peter Flinker said the zoning bylaw will need to incentivize the creation of the Town's vision without making it economically inviable.

Bob Mitchell noted that zoning for the business district will need to align with other Town processes so the permitting isn't overly restrictive. Bob Mitchell stated that without public water accessibility, the built environment will not improve. This can be done through private-public partnerships in investment, with aid from either the Town or the State.

Bob Mitchell asked Board members for their opinions of opportunities and roadblocks to advancing new zoning. Karen Kelleher said the lack of infrastructure is a known major obstacle to development or redevelopment opportunities. For example, the Stow House of Pizza had an approved Special Permit to expand, though it could not due to DEP requirements and the economic infeasibility of meeting those standards. Karen Kelleher said competition from surrounding towns, including Hudson and new development in Maynard, may also hinder progress in Lower Village. Karen Kelleher said the district is ripe for redevelopment, noting that some properties are underdeveloped and that 124 Great Road is for sale, and 108-118 Great Road is under new ownership. Karen Kelleher said that one concern the Board has is incentivizing uses, to achieve the Board's vision of a mix of business types.

Len Golder said that the completion of the streetscape improvements in Lower Village is hopefully an opportunity, as the Town invested in the project to bring better accessibility to the district for all modes of transportation.

Mark Jones said he sees the wide roadway as an obstacle to a walkable district. Mark Jones agreed that public water and septic infrastructure will severely limit improvements that could be made to the district.

Lori Clark added that the shopping plaza itself is not pedestrian friendly, though the current owner is unlikely to change the layout. Lori Clark asked how to get land owners in the district to share the Town's vision. Bob Mitchell noted that zoning will need to be written with the understanding that ownership changes.

Peter Flinker asked the Board what their priorities are for the district, and if there are any features of the district they would not want to see changed.

Len Golder said architectural design is key and noted that the Board has been discussing the addition of design guidelines. Bob Mitchell cautioned that design guidelines can be a roadblock for some communities, as the standards may not be economically viable because the cost to make improvements may necessitate drastically increasing rents in a district that already has vacancies.

Jonathan Bransfield noted that the draft bylaw includes mixed use standards and asked for more information about residential inclusion. Mark Jones said the Board itself is unsure of what is desirable and included mixed use in the draft to hear more from the consulting team. Mark Jones asked if residential development potential impairs commercial development. Mark Jones said that there are residences in the district, and it would be helpful if the revised zoning decreased nonconformities. Peter Flinker said residential development is leading and that given the district's distance from highways, commercial development may not be as strong as it is in other communities. Residential development could provide more demand for businesses such as restaurants to locate in Lower Village. Lori Clark said she is open to mixed use in the district when it is truly combined with retail. We do not want to lose the business district to primary residential over time. Lori Clark said that mixed use should be under one roof, rather than separated on a parcel and noted her concern for density.

Jonathan Bransfield asked what would be the scale of mixed use development that would provide the right balance of commercial development. Peter Flinker said residential rents could help make commercial development more likely. A downside to rising rents is that the current business owners may have to relocate if they can't afford to stay. Bob Mitchell added that mixed use development could allow older adults to remain in Stow.

Meg Costello said that does not want convenience for vehicle traffic to be a focus of zoning or redevelopment, as she feels is visible in Acton's Kelley's Corner. Meg Costello said that opportunities for the district include the proximity to the Assabet River Rail Trail and walking trails in nearby Open Space. Karen Kelleher added that another opportunity is seasonal agritourism.

Jesse Steadman said an opportunity is neighborhood convenience and the district's location along a commuter pathway. Jesse Steadman said zoning will need to find the balance between a bylaw that dictates form and design and one that is focused on specific uses. Case studies would be helpful to show how design guidelines or dimensional standards are used. The board discussed and agreed the emphasis on "sense of community."

John Colonna-Romano said that the district needs provide more benefit to residents than simply being a place to buy an item. John Colonna-Romano said that civic spaces could better tie the neighborhood together. Peter Flinker added that services can tie together a district as well, and the existence of medical offices and the post office are opportunities for the district.

Bob Collings said that he feels improvements will not be made to the district without public water infrastructure, and many of the parcels in Lower Village don't have enough land to comply with DEP requirements. Bob Mitchell agreed that infrastructure would be the most impactful way to make sure development meets the Town's vision.

Peter Flinker asked if there are other village districts that the Board looks to as examples of good design. The Board discussed West Concord and West Acton Village. Peter Flinker said the process to create West Concord included physical planning of the layout of the district, combined with the creation of a form based code. Peter Flinker said that West Acton started out differently from West Concord, as there were already a handful of businesses along Massachusetts Ave in Acton, so the focus was on infill development and walkability. Mark Jones inquired about the success and failures to strip malls. He asked the consultant to provide examples and literature on the successes with transforming commercial strips.

The consulting team agreed to pull together some case studies to show various approaches to zoning and will note some methods that have not worked. The next public meeting will be a presentation of a few zoning strategies that the team recommends.

Outdoor Dining Temporary Permits

The Planning Board reviewed a draft memo to the Board of Selectmen regarding a process to allow Temporary Outdoor Dining during the pandemic, as there are no businesses that currently have a Special Permit to allow this use. Jesse Steadman noted the policy was created with input from several departments, including the Board of Health, and that Town Counsel has weighed in on the language.

The Board agreed the licenses should only be effective for 6 months as the owner compiles a Special Permit application. The Board agreed that letters should be sent to all restaurants to explain the intent of the process.

Karen Kelleher moved to approve the memorandum and to recommend the Board of Selectmen adopt the Temporary Outdoor Dining policy as amended.

Margaret Costello seconded.

Roll Call Vote: Lori Clark- Yea; Karen Kelleher- Yea; John Colonna-Romano-Yea, Margaret Costello- Yea; Len Golder- Yea.

Lower Village Subcommittee Member Appointments

The Planning Board reviewed letters of interest from Jonathan Bransfield, Tom Farnsworth, and Megan Birch-McMichael, each of whom have previously served on the Subcommittee. The Board acknowledged their previous appointment of Lori Clark as liaison to the Subcommittee.

John Colonna- Romano moved to appoint all three as Lower Village Subcommittee members.

Margaret Costello seconded.

Roll Call Vote: Lori Clark- Yea; Karen Kelleher- Yea; John Colonna-Romano-Yea, Margaret Costello- Yea; Len Golder- Yea.

Meeting Adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

Valerie Oorthuys