

TOWN OF STOW
PLANNING BOARD

Minutes of the January 19, 2021 Planning Board Meeting

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

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

Correspondence

Lori Clark said several of the pieces of correspondence regarding the Stow House of Pizza pertained to the current public hearing and could therefore be discussed during that session. John Colonna-Romano suggested separating what is relevant to the Special Permit Public Hearing next week. Lori asked if the Building Inspector received a copy of the email from Leigh Hilderbrandt. Jesse Steadman said he did not, and could forward it for review. Lori Clark suggested that a letter be written to Leigh Hilderbrandt acknowledging her concerns and noting that anything relevant to the Special Permit Public Hearing will be considered as input and other matters relating to zoning more broadly will be discussed during working sessions on the current Lower Village Zoning Effort.

Planning Board Member Updates

Karen Kelleher said that the Zoning Board of Appeals received notification that the applicant at Mistletoe Farm decided not to pursue a variance request.

Lori Clark mentioned the Gun Shop is temporarily closed with no information on reason or length of time. Lori Clark also said the Bank of America's sign is down.

Assistant Planner Interview – Malcom Ragan

Jesse Steadman introduced Malcom Ragan to the Board as an Assistant Planner candidate. Lori Clark introduced the members of the Planning Board and Department, explaining the interview questions process.

John Colonna-Romano asked Malcom's thoughts on primary planning issues in a town of Stow's size and makeup. Malcom Ragan said he completed a college project on economic development for Boxboro which is very similar to Stow with commonalities relating demographics, taxes, and land use. In a town of such size there is a need to balance business retention with environmental planning considerations, such as the health of public water supplies. The project focused on a plan for maintaining the economic and ecological base for the town.

Lori Clark asked Malcom why he chose planning. Malcom Ragan said he began his undergraduate studies focusing on ecology, ethics, philosophy, and environmental politics, and started to focus on land ethics, land use, planning, process, and development.

John Colonna-Romano discussed the balance of planning between maintaining the historical features of a community versus the tension of modern progress and asked how Malcom he would accomplish finding that balance. Malcom said the first step would be engaging residents. He said he would use analytical data, surveys, and other tools in planning to inform any effort, while properly looking at the historical and rural character and understanding what those terms meant to residents in a functional way.

Karen Kelleher asked about Malcom's knowledge of Zoning Subdivision Law. Malcom Ragan said that his knowledge base in this area was more classroom exercises and he has not had the opportunity to apply that knowledge in the field.

Lori Clark asked Malcom to discuss his experience in his internships and field practicums. Malcom explained economic development study as finding the "pulse" of the community by using a survey outreach process and conducting interviews at the most common place to find residents - the transfer station. The team used a map on a board where residents could provide comment

Len Golder said following up on the internship at Boxboro did Malcom think that work was applicable to Stow. Malcom said yes adding that outreach to public for affordable housing is a region wide concern.

John Colonna-Romano asked on the aspect of Stow Planning what would be your most and least exciting part of the position. Malcom Ragan answered what most excites him is the population - scale of the town. A town this size offers the opportunity to engage residents more closely on a variety of issues.

Lori Clark asked Malcom Ragan if he had any questions for the board. Malcom Ragan said he was curious on scope of projects and the scale in play for 40B and how it is approached in Town. Lori Clark explained the different stakeholders involved in 40B applications.

Malcom Ragan asked when the last time there was a change in the Bylaws. Lori Clark said that at nearly every Town Meeting there is at least one zoning change. Jesse Steadman said some recent large zoning changes involved Recreational Marijuana. Lori Clark added the town is involved in one of the golf course tracts of land and zoning issues which will come with the development where we encourage protecting the scenic vistas and conservation of the land.

Lori Clark thanked Malcom Ragan for participating.

Lori Clark asked the board their thoughts on Malcom Ragan.

John Romano-Colonna said he liked him adding he has good insight, well versed on a number of things, including known issues that are similar to the Boxboro experience.

Karen Kelleher said Malcom interviewed well. He answered questions honestly where he did not have any experience to report on.

Len Golder said Malcom came across as articulate, intelligent thinking, and had a good grasp on Boxboro which is similar to Stow.

Margaret Costello said she liked what Malcom said about ecological theory, environmental aesthetics and systems overview. Margaret Costello liked how he mapped out clear pathways including aesthetic value in public housing. Margaret Costello said she liked his thoughts on public participation and felt he had a philosophical approach to decision making.

Lori Clark said she liked Malcom's energy. Lori Clark said he is smart, articulate, and can communicate clearly at various levels, from discussion of details to broader concepts. Lori Clark said he is genuine and his answers were insightful. Lori Clark said Malcom understands process,

and seems to have good intuition. Lori Clark indicated his drawbacks in experience are things that Jesse has indicated he could teach.

Lori Clark asked Jesse Steadman his comments. Jesse Steadman commented he wanted to see how Malcom handled the setting, similar to public hearings and was very pleased. Jesse Steadman said he has an overall understanding of Planning and theory. Jesse Steadman said that the permitting and decision writing is something that is teachable and would like to move to the next step. Jesse Steadman said he will be setting up a meeting with the Town Administrator.

Lori Clark asked Susan Ostrander her comments. Susan Ostrander said she could see Jesse and Malcom having a robust conversation. Susan Ostrander said she feels he would be an asset to the department, the Board, and the Town.

Working Meeting Items

Lower Village Re-Zoning Effort

Jesse Steadman presented a review of the Dodson and Flinker Lower Village Setback Guidance. The board discussed setbacks as to current buildings specifically located on Route 117 and location of parking for businesses. Lori Clark discussed the board's opportunity to encourage parking in the back or side of buildings instead of in the front creating a streetscape instead of a sea of cars. Jesse Steadman commented on the idea of street parking and Route 117 and setbacks and the constraints the Board is confronted with in a district that does not have the ability for on street parking.

The Board discussed various uses in the table of principle uses in the Zoning Bylaw and determined that some needed more explanation in the zoning bylaw if they were to be included. Overall, the Board agreed they are looking to incentivize uses that are compatible with an attractive business and gateway district rather than automobile centric uses.

The discussion continued to include outdoor dining and park like bench settings to promote the walkability of the area. Jesse Steadman discussed density and what that definition looks like for Lower Village. The board discussed density as it pertained to Lower Village. Lori Clark commented that the board has focused more on design guidelines than density. The board discussed retail and housing options as it pertains to the density of the area. Jesse Steadman said he would put together the comments from the board for the consultants to review.

2021 Legislative Update

Jesse Steadman explained the specific policy consequences of the 2021 Economic Development Bill, noting that the Housing Choice provisions from 2019, have been incorporated. Jesse Steadman also indicated that for the Board to be eligible for a range of future funding opportunities, they will need to provide a by right multi-family housing provision in their bylaw.

Respectfully Submitted,
Susan Ostrander