

TOWN OF STOW
PLANNING BOARD

Minutes of the January 10, 2023 Planning Board meeting

Planning Board members present: Lori Clark, Karen Kelleher, John Colonna-Romano, Nancy Arsenault,
Mark Jones (voting associate), Deborah Woods (non-voting associate)
Planning Board members absent: Margaret Costello

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

Karen Kelleher motioned to approve the minutes of September 7, 2022 as amended
John Colonna-Romano seconded

Roll Call Vote: Lori Clark -**Yea**; Karen Kelleher -**Yea**; John Colonna-Romano -**Yea**;
Nancy Arsenault -**Yea**

Karen Kelleher motioned to approve the minutes of December 6, 2022 as amended
John Colonna-Romano seconded

Roll Call Vote: Lori Clark -**Yea**; Karen Kelleher -**Yea**; John Colonna-Romano -**Yea**;
Nancy Arsenault -**Yea**

Correspondence

Chair Lori Clark said she was happy to see that the Department of Housing & Community Development approved Stow's action plan for complying with new multifamily zoning requirements for MBTA communities by the end of 2025.

Public Input

Dorothy Granat asked for clarification regarding the Planning Board's involvement in an ongoing Lower Village water feasibility study. Lori Clark said that the Select Board authorized expenditure of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for the study and that the Planning Board has no direct involvement at this stage.

Planning Board member updates

John Colonna-Romano said the Green Advisory Committee (GAC) put out a survey in December and have received a good number of responses. John Colonna-Romano said the GAC will consider how to use those results in a Climate Action Plan.

PUBLIC HEARING CONTINUATION – 98 Old Bolton Road Hammerhead Lot Special Permit Modification

Scott Hayes, PE, introduced himself as representative of applicants Raymond Mong & Jacqueline Prince and KC Building.

Scott Hayes presented some visuals to demonstrate which lots are the subject of the proposed Hammerhead Lot Special Permit modification, and which will be subject of a land swap following a modification to the Special Permit. Scott Hayes said that 98 Old Bolton Road would be made into a standard, dimensionally conforming lot by swap with the abutting 7 Maple St. The 7 Maple St lot would be made large enough to divide into 2 conforming lots. Scott Hayes said the swap of land area can only be done following Planning Board endorsement of an ANR plan, which can be reviewed after the Special Permit modification is granted.

Scott Hayes said that 94 Old Bolton Road would continue to be governed by the Hammerhead Lot Special Permit from 1990, and that 94 Old Bolton Road's access would be over an existing shared driveway that crosses 98 Old Bolton Road. Scott Hayes clarified that 7 Maple Street was not part of the 1990 Special Permit and would not be under the requested modification.

John Colonna-Romano noted a condition in the 1990 Special Permit was that lots not be further subdivided. Lori Clark asked if 98 Old Bolton Road could be further divided if it were removed from the previous Special Permit. Scott Hayes said that it could be, although the frontage and other dimensional qualities would make it difficult. Scott Hayes said there are no plans to further divide the parcel and that 98 and 94 Old Bolton Road are owned by the same family.

Lori Clark asked for public comments or questions. None were offered.

Lori Clark asked if Staff have any concerns with the proposed Special Permit modification. Valerie Oorthuys said staff reviewed the frontage provided and concluded that it complies with the Zoning Bylaw, even if it looks somewhat strange in how it doubles back on itself. Malcolm Ragan said staff want to ensure that driveway rights for 94 Old Bolton Road across 98 Old Bolton Road are maintained. Scott Hayes said that the layout of the existing driveway easement has been placed on the plan and will be referenced in any property deeds.

Valerie Oorthuys said since 94 Old Bolton Road was a subject of the 1990 Special Permit, the owners should provide their written approval for the Special Permit modification. Scott Hayes said that no changes are proposed for that lot and said he does not believe a signature from them is required. Lori Clark asked that some acknowledgement or consent to request the proposed change be provided by owners of 94 Old Bolton Road.

Karen Kelleher motioned to close the Public Hearing
John Colonna-Romano seconded

Roll Call Vote: Lori Clark -**Yea**; Karen Kelleher -**Yea**; John Colonna-Romano -**Yea**;
Nancy Arsenaault -**Yea**

Lori Clark said that staff will prepare a Special Permit decision and the Board will review the attached ANR plan at the same meeting they review that draft decision. Karen Kelleher cautioned that the Board must allow the 20-day appeal period for the Special Permit to pass before they can consider an ANR endorsement. Staff said they will review timelines and determine the earliest date the Board can review the submitted ANR plan.

Planning Board Member Updates (cont.)

Chair Lori Clark said the real estate listing for the former Bose property now presents its potential for residential development. Lori Clark noted that a portion of the parcel along Old Bolton Road is, in fact, zoned residential. Lori Clark asked if there is any update on the private academy that was previously proposed for the site. Valerie Oorthuys said the Masters Academy is still a possibility and that the project proponent has not given up on acquiring the site.

John Colonna-Romano said he noticed the AT&T backup generator has been installed at the Gleasondale Mill, and that protective bollards and a fence have been installed per the Board's conditions in an earlier Site Plan Approval.

Valerie Oorthuys said the Select Board has asked that revisions to the Town Charter not be a topic for discussion at the upcoming joint boards meeting with the Planning Board. Valerie Oorthuys said the Select Board will instead want to discuss warrant articles the Planning Board is preparing to bring to Town Meeting in May. Valerie Oorthuys said the Charter Review Committee will be collating feedback from the Planning Board and Select Board and will look to reach an agreement. Lori Clark said there should be greater clarity on whether the Planning Board is attending a Select Board's meeting as guests or if it is a true joint-boards meeting.

Lori Clark said that recent online discourse about increases to tax bills will make passing anything at Town Meeting more challenging.

Board verified scheduled meetings for January 17, 24; February 7, 15 (Wednesday), and March 7, 14, 28.

Lower Village Zoning Amendments

Valerie Oorthuys said that staff are aiming to schedule a first public forum very soon. Karen Kelleher said it might make sense to start with a presentation to Boards and Committees to iron out any glaring issues.

Planner's Report

Planning Director Valerie Oorthuys recapped a public meeting regarding a proposed intersection realignment at Marlboro Road/Route 62. Valerie Oorthuys said a single lane on one segment of the triangular intersection has been blocked off, and that traffic counts will be compared against the status quo. Valerie Oorthuys said the other lane of that road segment will be blocked off following a Select Board vote to install a stop sign at another part of the intersection.

Valerie Oorthuys said the Town Administrator's office is working to schedule a public forum for rehabilitation of the Barton Road dam in late January, and that a final date will be announced soon. Valerie Oorthuys said the town will be closing on the purchase of most of the Stow Acres north course on Friday. Valerie Oorthuys said that the Select Board will be voting to endorse a deed to assume ownership of a small lot in Lower Village, which was donated to the town during negotiations related to a small residential subdivision. Valerie Oorthuys said the Planning Board will be asked to release that developer from an old performance guarantee at an upcoming meeting.

Joint Boards Meeting with Select Board – Hudson Road/Route 117 Signalization Design

Planning Director Valerie Oorthuys said that the town first completed a signal study for the intersection in 2016, which found that several warrants for signalization were met. Tom Bigelow of Green International Affiliates, contracted by the Town to design the signalization, presented three design alternatives. Tom Bigelow said that the first two alternatives achieve a desired left turn lane for westbound traffic on Route 117 at the cost of encroachment onto the MassDOT controlled bridge over Elizabeth Brook and significant intersection reconstruction. Tom Bigelow said that Green International is recommending their third alternative, which does not include a left turn lane. Tom Bigelow said this alternative has no impacts on nearby utilities or the bridge and allows for greater sidewalk construction with minimal impacts to abutting properties.

Tom Bigelow said this alternative #3 would include a signal mast on the north side of the intersection, with a controller cabinet at the southwest corner. Tom Bigelow said that signal timing can be configured to include an advance cycle for left turns off Route 117 for westbound traffic. Tom Bigelow said new pedestrian equipment will be installed and the signal will be synchronized with the signal at the nearby Harvest Drive.

Tom Bigelow said the preferred alternative achieves a Level of Service (LOS) “C” during the PM peak and a LOS “A” for the AM peak. Tom Bigelow said the Hudson Road side of the intersection is currently operating at a LOS “F” during PM peak. Tom Bigelow said that a LOS “C” is considered acceptable by MassDOT standards.

Tom Bigelow said there are three curb cuts on the approach to the intersection from the south, two for the liquor store, one for the gas station. Tom Bigelow said Green has recommended closing the northern curb cut at the liquor store, which will require discussions with the business owners to understand impacts. Tom Bigelow said Green evaluated combining the entrances of the gas station and liquor store and found that grade differences and an outcrop of ledge would make this difficult.

Tom Bigelow said the preferred alternative includes construction of roughly 400 feet of sidewalk southwards towards a former crosswalk, which was previously removed due to a lack of a proper landing ramp. This crosswalk could then be reconstructed to serve nearby housing developments.

Nancy Arsenault asked if the curb cuts into the gas station would be significantly altered under the preferred alternative. Tom Bigelow said that their preferred approach would not significantly alter the geometry of the entrances. Nancy Arsenault asked how far traffic backup along Route 117 might be under a high traffic scenario. Tom Bigelow said that Green’s projections estimate traffic backing up to roughly 220 feet in extreme cases, roughly the length of 8 or 9 cars.

Lori Clark said that further development is anticipated in this area, and asked how traffic projections accounted for that. Tom Bigelow said typical methodology includes an assumed 1% annual growth of vehicle trips over 7-8 years, and that vehicle trips from known future developments were added to that forecast. Lori Clark asked how many vehicle trips would be added to downgrade the LOS to a “D” in the signalization scenario. Tom Bigelow said he will follow up with a number, but said that the 1% annual growth rate frequently exceeds actual increases in vehicle trips.

John Colonna-Romano asked if some large vehicles would have a difficult time navigating the turning radii under the recommended alternative. Tom Bigelow said they have evaluated turns and that vehicles

like fire trucks and school buses should have no issues turning without encroaching into other lanes. Tom Bigelow said that any vehicle that can navigate the intersection today will be able to under the preferred alternative. Tom Bigelow said most large trucks will be able to navigate without encroaching into other lanes, with only some of the largest that are legally allowed to travel on I-495 likely to encroach.

Select Board member Hector Constantzos asked if a different Level of Service would be achieved with the other design alternatives. Tom Bigelow said that all scenarios anticipate a similar LOS and any differences are negligible. Hector Constantzos asked what the LOS would be if the intersection was significantly expanded to include a left turn lane. Tom Bigelow said that they did not perform that analysis because they knew that the bridge was a major constraint. Hector Constantzos asked if widening of the bridge is anticipated in the future regardless of the approach to the intersection. Tom Bigelow said when MassDOT replaces the bridge it will likely be widened to meet their updated engineering standards.

Cortni Frecha asked if the driveway entrance of the gas station might be used to bypass the traffic signal. Tom Bigelow said that is a possibility, and that the driveways are closer to the intersection than modern engineering standards would allow. A turn restrictions coming out of the gas station were considered but that would significantly impact the operations of the gas station.

Police Chief Michael Sallese said the project should help reduce the number of accidents at this intersection. Michael Sallese said that this will improve driver safety and reduce delays from accidents.

Hector Constantzos asked if curb cut modifications and turn restrictions will be recommended regardless of the selected alternative. Tom Bigelow said a center island at the gas station exit to Route 117 was evaluated, but it was found that many types of vehicles would be unable to access the site. Tom Bigelow said that a sign limiting turns could be installed, but enforcement would be a serious challenge. Hector Constantzos asked which movement through the intersection has resulted in the most accidents. Michael Sallese said many of the accidents result from westbound traffic on Route 117 waiting to turn left onto Hudson Road and being rear ended.

Town Administrator Denise Dembowski asked if the town can restrict turning movements in and out of private property. Planning Director Valerie Oorthuys said that could be negotiated with the property owner or included as a condition of the existing Special Permit whenever it is next modified. Michael Sallese said the traffic rules and orders could be revised to restrict turns but that enforcement would be challenging.

Resident Carol Lynn said that turning left out onto Route 117 from Orchard is challenging during peak hours, and asked if traffic backup west along Route 117 could create sight line issues. Tom Bigelow said they have done no specific assessment of sight lines at that location and that extreme case backups will not extend as far west as that intersection.

Resident Tom Ryan said he has been driving through this intersection every day for the last 22 years, and it would be a bad idea to install a traffic signal. Tom Ryan said signalization would be a huge waste of money and will not solve any issues at the intersection. Tom Ryan said he does not believe there is sufficient safety concerns to warrant the traffic signal.

Resident Deb Woods said the frequent accidents for vehicles traveling west on Route 117 would not be addressed with the recommended alternative, as no left turn lane will be provided.

Resident Bill Byron asked how a new traffic signal would be synched with the existing signal at Harvest Drive to the west. Tom Bigelow said that GPS clock units can be installed in both control cabinets and configured by a signal technician.

Police Michael Sallese said that accident data does not show near misses, which are common at this location, and that additional traffic in this area will create new hazards. Michael Sallese said he is disappointed that a left turn lane is not recommended but understands the limitations placed by the MassDOT controlled bridge over Elizabeth Brook.

Other Joint-Boards Topics

Lori Clark said that Planning staff provided a memo listing the warrant articles the Planning Board expect to submit for annual Town Meeting. Lori Clark said that Planning Board will present proposed amendments to the Lower Village Business District at some events for Town staff and committees, after which there will be multiple public consultations.

Valerie Oorthuys said that Verizon requested some amendments to the Wireless Service Facility overlay district, which has prompted a more thorough review of that language by the Board. Lori Clark said that regardless of what was discussed or agreed between the owners of Verizon and the Stow Acres country club, the zoning bylaw does not allow for construction of a tower at that site.

Lori Clark said the Planning Board will formally request that the Select Board appoint a Comprehensive/Master Plan committee, and that the Planning Department will publish a short survey to help frame that effort. Select Board chair Megan Birch-McMichael said she is happy to see updates to the Master Plan moving forward.

Lower Village Zoning Amendments (cont.)

The Planning Board reviewed a draft presentation summarizing the proposed zoning changes. The Board discussed how to visualize proposed zoning changes and how to present newly allowed uses. Lori Clark said that the discussion should do more to emphasize the vision of a pedestrian-oriented village center so that it is clear why changes to dimensional requirements are proposed. The Board reiterated that this bylaw may take years to affect changes, but that the high vacancy rates create a need to get some improved zoning in place before sites are redeveloped.

Valerie Oorthuys said she will schedule presentations on the proposed zoning changes to Town departments and committees, which will have a day and evening session to accommodate schedules.

Respectfully submitted,
Malcolm Ragan