

TOWN OF STOW
PLANNING BOARD

Minutes of the August 8, 2023, Planning Board Meeting

Planning Board members present: Lori Clark, Karen Kelleher, Margaret Costello, Nancy Arsenault, John Colonna-Romano, Deb Woods (voting associate)

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

Review of Correspondence

The Board received correspondence from MetroWest Collaborative Development regarding the Town's subsidized housing inventory. Nancy Arsenault asked if it was true that Plantation Apartments' affordability will be expiring in 2025. Karen Kelleher stated that she believes that the Town purchased an affordability in perpetuity restriction on the property. Valerie Oorthuys stated that DHCD will need to be contacted to make the correction, something that Staff can coordinate.

Nancy Arsenault asked how many new affordable units will be included with the Stow Acres development. Valerie Oorthuys did not recall the number of units that will be affordable at the Stow Acres development, but the town is anticipating to be at about 12 percent once Stow Acres is permitted. She noted that the percentage of affordable units will change from one Census to another as the number of units, affordable or market rate, will change.

Karen Kelleher stated that rental units have allowed many communities to increase the number of units in their subsidized housing inventory. John Colonna-Romano noted that many of the towns and cities in Massachusetts do not meet 10% affordable units.

Nancy Arsenault noted that a development of rental cottages Deershorn Road in Lancaster is something that she envisions for cottage style development. She stated that the developer's website lists Stow Acres as an upcoming location for a cottage development even though only a portion of the development will be cottages. Karen Kelleher asked if the cottages at Stow Acres will be rental units. Valerie Oorthuys stated that she believes it is the intention to make the cottages rental.

Margaret Costello asked why the correspondence from MetroWest Collaborative Development references if the affordable housing unit was built with a Comprehensive Permit. Karen Kelleher responded that Comprehensive Permits require a higher percentage of affordable unit than what is otherwise required. Valerie Oorthuys stated that she believes it helps the State monitor how effective MGL Chapter 40B is.

Public Input

Nancy Arsenault stated that she saw Nan's Rustic Kitchen and Market posted on Instagram that they will be adding indoor bar seating to the Stow location; she asked if this would be in violation of their Special Permit. Valerie Oorthuys responded that Nan's is allowed 42 seats total on site; she stated that for every 1 picnic table they remove outside, they will be allowed to add 6 bar seats.

Nancy Arsenault stated that she saw tree clearing and excavation work at 124 Great Road, and that the Board did not grant any permits relating to that site. Valerie Oorthuys stated that the property owner was given a cease-and-desist order from the Building Commissioner. She noted that some tree clearing work

can be done without a permit, but excavation of the site requires a permit from the Planning Board. Margaret Costello stated that the site work went on for several days, and she would like the Building Department to stop unpermitted excavation immediately. Nancy Arsenault agreed with Margaret Costello.

Nancy Arsenault asked if the owner of 124 Great Road has met with Staff. Valerie Oorthuys stated that the owner has met with Staff and was made aware of the Special Permit Process. Margaret Costello asked if there are any ramifications for someone performing unpermitted site work. Valerie Oorthuys responded that in the case of 124 Great Road, she is unaware if the Building Commissioner will be issuing fines. Lori Clark suggested that, in the future, new property owners with the intention to develop could be given an information sheet that outlines what development requires a Special Permit.

Margaret Costello asked what grade incline on a site requires a permit prior to grading. Valerie Oorthuys stated that the Erosion Control Special Permit lists what grade requires a permit.

Leigh Hilderbrandt, 196 Great Road, stated that she believes it is difficult for property owners to access information on the Town Website regarding what requires a permit. She stated that the Building Department only lists sign and lighting regulations, and not the other types of permits issued from the Planning Board.

Roy Miller, no address provided, asked the Board for more information what is a Public Forum and how a Public Forum differs from a Public Hearing. Lori Clark stated that Public Forums are a place where the Board can provide information and ask for feedback and from the public. She stated that a Public Hearing is response to a submitted application and requires the Board and public to comment and provide input.

Roy Miller, no address provided, asked the Board if a Public Forum is followed by a Public Hearing. Lori Clark stated that it depends. She stated that a Public Hearing is specific to an activity like a Special Permit. She stated that a Public Forum is broader and can be useful in gathering input prior to beginning work, such as initial feedback on a Bylaw amendment. Margaret Costello added that written correspondence is an effective way to be heard at both Forums and Hearings.

Roy Miller, no address provided, asked the Board if the Planning Board's Public Hearing on August 15, 2023, will be a decision making hearing. Lori Clark stated that the Hearing will provide a basis for a decision. She stated that once the Public Hearing is closed, the Board will deliberate and make a decision based on what was presented and what was heard.

Planning Board Members' Updates

Lori Clark reminded the Members of the Board about open meeting laws and to not create or share posts on social media regarding upcoming Public Hearings.

Planning Director's Report

Housing Production Plan

The Housing Production Plan Working Group met on July 31, 2023, to assist on the 2023 update to the Housing Production Plan. Members of the Working Group include members affiliated with the Stow Municipal Affordable Housing Trust and the Stow Housing Authority.

148-156 Great Road

The applicant has been sent a reminder that an updated Site Plan is due on August 31, 2023.

Joanne Drive Subdivision

Chuck Black, developer of the Joanne Drive Subdivision, is expected to come before the Board with a revised plan for the placement of street trees at 64 and 66 Joanne Drive.

Public Forum: Crescent Street Sidewalk Improvement

Jointly held with the Complete Streets Committee

Planning Department Staff presented information on behalf of the Board and the Complete Streets Committee to the public. Staff presented general information about:

- The goals and purposes of the Complete Streets Committee,
- Complete Streets principles,
- Goals of Stow regarding Complete Streets,
- Completed Complete Streets projects in Stow, and
- The proposal to add sidewalks on the north side of Crescent Street.

Staff continued the presentation by revealing engineered plans that identified the location of proposed sidewalks. Staff explained that the proposed sidewalk project will begin at the intersection of Hartley Road and end at the intersection of Warren Road and West Acton Road. Staff identified materials used for the sidewalks, additions of grass buffers, a crosswalk across Crescent Street, and improvements to stormwater management infrastructure. Staff asked if there are any questions or comments from the public attending.

John Colonna-Romano asked if the crosswalk will have wayfinding features added that will let people know what the crosswalk will lead to. Valerie Oorthuys replied that the Conservation Commission may consider wayfinding signage in the future to direct people Town Center Park, but they have no current plans. She stated that the crosswalk may not be useful at the moment, but it will be important to hear feedback from residents to know if it is needed. Lori Clark stated that the location of the proposed crosswalk is a natural place where people cross Crescent Street.

Debra Reed, 53 Crescent Street, stated that many people use the right of way that the proposed crosswalk leads to, and that people cross Crescent Street at the location of the proposed crosswalk even though it can be unsafe. As a resident who lives adjacent to the location of the proposed crosswalk, she observes that there is a significant amount of pedestrian traffic of people walking with children, strollers, and animals. She expressed concern that people speed on Crescent Street heading westward toward Hartley Road and would like signage, speed bumps, and speed feedback devices to be considered.

Margaret Costello asked why a sign to Town Center Park is not currently being considered. Valerie Oorthuys stated that she will check in with the Conservation Commission to ask about their plans. Debra Reed, 53 Crescent Street, added that a proposed sign should state that there is no vehicle parking at the entrance from Crescent Street. David Reed, 53 Crescent Street, agreed that a sign and a crosswalk would be useful for the project.

Margaret Costello asked what the minimum width of the sidewalk would be to meet ADA compliance. Valerie Oorthuys stated that a width of three feet meets ADA regulations.

Margaret Costello asked for more information about the stormwater management infrastructure. Valerie Oorthuys stated that the infrastructure is funded as part of this project, and that the plans have been reviewed by other Town Departments. She continued that the system is not intensive and will be integrated into the existing underground system.

Colin Brench, 73 Crescent Street, stated he has concerns about the crosswalk because of the speed of vehicles traveling on Crescent Street; he asked if there will be any warning signs added that will alert vehicles of the crosswalk. Valerie Oorthuys stated that the plans do not include signage for the crosswalk but is something that will need to be considered.

Leigh Hilderbrandt, 196 Great Road, asked why granite curbs are considered for this project when asphalt curbs have been used elsewhere in Town. Valerie Oorthuys stated that the granite curbs can be substituted for asphalt based on feedback from the boards, committees and public. She included that asphalt curbs were used in the Lower Village to maintain the rural feel of the village. Leigh Hilderbrandt stated that she believes the reason for asphalt curbs in the Lower Village was to save money. Karen Kelleher replied that saving money was part of the justification for asphalt curbing, but it was done for maintaining the rural feel and safety for vehicles on narrow areas of Great Road.

Margaret Costello stated that granite curbs are more long lasting than asphalt curbs, noting that snowplows damage asphalt curbs if the curb is struck by the plow. Lori Clark added that the previous Highway Department Superintendent has been opposed to granite curbs. She asked if the current Highway Department Superintendent supports granite curbs.

Ed Piecewicz, 58 Crescent Street, stated he observed pedestrians walking on the southern side of Crescent Street instead of the northern side of Crescent Street where the sidewalks are proposed. He stated that he believes adding sidewalks to the northern side of the street may not help improve the safety along Crescent Street. He stated that he is unsatisfied that the proposed retaining wall on the plan is specified to be concrete blocks instead of fieldstone which he believes maintains the rural character of the area. He asked if the sidewalk could be reconsidered to be on the southern side of Crescent Street.

Nancy Arsenault asked if any easements are required for this project. Valerie Oorthuys stated that a temporary easement or right of entry will be required from 58 Crescent Street for the replacement of the retaining wall.

Lori Clark asked where the concrete block retaining wall would be located on the site. Valerie identified the location of the proposed concrete block retaining wall and indicated it would be moved slightly back from the right of way. Karen Kelleher and Lori Clark both expressed concerns about the aesthetics of the concrete blocks. Debra Reed, 53 Crescent Street, stated that she believes a concrete block retaining wall would not match the other fieldstone walls in the area.

Margaret Costello asked what is preventing a stone retaining wall from being built. Valerie Oorthuys stated that she will ask the engineer for the specifications on the wall and will ask about fieldstone instead.

Lori Clark asked what selection criteria the engineers had for the placement of the crosswalk. Valerie Oorthuys stated that it was selected as a place that would have adequate sight lines. She noted that vehicle speed is still a concern.

Debra Reed, 53 Crescent Street, asked what determined the speed limit on Crescent Street and for the consideration of extending the school zone east on Crescent Street. David Reed, 53, Crescent Street, asked for consideration of lowering the speed limit. Valerie Oorthuys stated that signage, like a school zone sign, is not eligible for Complete Streets funding, but the Town can acquire signage through other funding mechanisms.

Nancy Arsenault asked for the landscape triangle at the intersection of Crescent Street and West Acton Road could be utilized as a pedestrian refuge island and sidewalks could be constructed along the southern side of Crescent Street to the right of way to Town Center Park. Ed Piecewicz, 58 Crescent Street, agreed with Nancy Arsenault, and stated that he believes that it would increase safety.

Karen Kelleher asked the residents at the meeting where they notice people crossing Crescent Street. David Reed, 53 Crescent Street, stated that he observes people crossing at the location of the proposed crosswalk. Ed Piecewicz, 58 Crescent Street, stated that he does not see people walking on the north side of Crescent Street.

Leigh Hilderbrandt, 196 Great Road, asked what the speed limit on Crescent Street is and if the speed limit can be 25 miles per hour like roads with unposted speed limits. Valerie Oorthuys stated that the speed limit for Crescent Street is posted at 30 miles per hour. Karen Kelleher stated that it is not an easy process to lower the speed limit as the town would need to work with the State on a speed study. She added that the study could reveal that the speed limit may need to increase.

Jesse Steadman, business owner at 36 Tuttle Lane, stated that he would like a landing pad to be included at the northwest corner of the Hartley Road and Crescent Street intersection. He encouraged that the Highway Department be include in the discussion regarding the driveway to Hillside Cemetery. He suggested the use of a rapid flashing beacon to be included at the proposed crosswalk, and for the consideration of using a stamped concrete product to provide the illusion of a stone wall. He supports the use of granite curbs for the sidewalk. Margaret Costello agrees with Jesse Steadman's suggestion of a rapid flashing beacon.

Margaret Costello stated that a guardrail could be added for additional safety in the landscape buffers between the sidewalk and street. Lori Clark stated that it could help provide a safe feel, but areas without a landscape buffer are generally areas where it feels less safe.

Amanda Bennett, 28 Crescent Street, stated that there is a steep grade in front of her residence and 26 Crescent Street between the street and existing sidewalk; she asked if this steep grade will be addressed in the project. She also asked if the existing sidewalk and fragments of sidewalk will be removed as part of the project. She expressed concern about people speeding, particularly those who are going to the elementary and middle schools. Valerie Oorthuys replied that the existing sidewalk and sidewalk fragments will be removed and replaced with a wider sidewalk. She stated that she will ask the engineer about the grade between the sidewalk and road.

Amanda Bennett, 28 Crescent Street, asked if driveway aprons will be repaved as part of the project. Valerie Oorthuys stated that she will review what is being proposed for the driveways and send correspondence.

Margaret Costello asked if the proposed sidewalks would have a better substrate than what is existing. Valerie confirmed that the new sidewalks will be constructed at a higher standard which will include a compacted substrate that would prevent the sidewalks from fragmenting.

Amanda Bennett, 28 Crescent Street, asked if there is a maintenance plan for the sidewalks, particularly in winter. Valerie Oorthuys stated that she is currently unaware of a plan for sidewalk maintenance but will contact the Highway Department as this has been a concern heard regarding other sidewalks in Town.

Staff concluded the forum by sharing how the proposed sidewalks meet the complete street goals of the Town and how residents can contact members of the Planning Department.

Review of Memorandum Regarding Common Road

Lori Clark asked the Board what purview the Board has in the one-way modification to Common Road. She explained that the modification to Common Road is not a current project of the Board, and that the Board may be too late to provide a memorandum to the Select Board.

Karen Kelleher responded to Lori Clark's question stating that the modification to Common Road relates to the Board's Town Center Transportation Concept Plan project. She added that she heard from the Police Chief that there will be further discussion about the modification. Lori Clark replied that she is unaware of the timeline of the project and its relation to the Library Renovation project and the Board's Town Center Project.

Valerie Oorthuys stated that she believes it would be most effective for members of the Board to send correspondence directly to the Select Board as residents instead of collectively as a Board.

Karen Kelleher stated that she supports the formatting of the draft memorandum and its discussion of potential impacts. John Colonna-Romano added that the impacts of the modification are unknown, and that the Board providing information about what the Board can offer may be useful when making a decision.

Karen Kelleher stated that she does not see making a recommendation as planners as overstepping. Margaret Costello agreed with Karen Kelleher. She added that she does not approve of the outreach and management process that is being conducted for the modification.

Lori Clark, based on the feedback from the Board, directed the conversation to the content of the memorandum. Karen Kelleher stated that she agrees with the statement in the draft memorandum that level of service does not necessarily equate to pedestrian safety. Nancy Arsenault stated that she believes that the Board should be a partner in the discussion as the modification is a large project.

Karen Kelleher stated that she would like the last paragraph of the draft memorandum should be removed as it may be inconsistent to what was drafted prior. Nancy Arsenault and Lori Clark agreed with Karen Kelleher's proposed amendment.

Nancy Arsenault stated that she does not know why the modification to Common Road is being proposed. She stated that she believes that the modification is due to the renovations at Randall Library to accommodate additional parking.

Lori Clark asked when a Public Hearing would be for the modification to Common Road. Valerie Oorthuys responded that a Public Hearing has not yet been scheduled, and that she is unaware if the Select Board has had the opportunity to discuss the modifications. Valerie Oorthuys added that she believes that the Select Board will have a Public Hearing held in the future and that a decision would likely not be made without a Public Hearing.

John Colonna-Romano stated he believes that the modification to Common Road is to accommodate the renovations to the Library. Karen Kelleher stated the modification was discussed to accommodate more parking. Nancy Arsenault stated that the modification was done to accommodate a new courtyard for the Library. Michael Slagle clarified that the Library application to the Zoning Board of Appeals does not include a modification to the flow of traffic on Common Road.

Margaret Costello stated that she is concerned that traffic consultants may not know when to best conduct traffic studies. Valerie Oorthuys stated that for the Town Center Transportation Concept Plan project, the consultant will work closely with the Planning Department to obtain accurate data for peak travel times.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Michael Slagle