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**MORRISTOWN/MORRISVILLE**
**PLANNING COMMISSION**
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**Minutes of November 3, 2009**

Members Present: Bill Henchey, Lauren Traister, Max Paine, Andrew Volansky, John Meyer, Reeves Larson, Paul Griswold

Members Absent: none

Staff: Mark Leonard (ZA), Bill Rossmassler (LCPC Planner), Heidi Krantz (Community Coordinator)

Guests: Joss Besse & Faith Ingulsrud (VT Dept of Housing & Community Affairs' Community Planning & Revitalization Division), Morristown Conservation Commissioner Steve Rae

Agenda: see attached

Chairman Bill Henchey called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm and introduced the guests. He reviewed the agenda, a discussion on Growth Centers & Smart Growth Planning. He explained the Planning Commission's current task of reviewing growth policies & zoning options along the Route 100 corridor and asked the guests to help define the concept of 'smart growth'

Joss Besse explained the functions & responsibilities of the Dept of Housing & Community Affairs' Community Planning & Revitalization Division and provided the statutory definition of 'Smart Growth'. Bill H asked if smart growth principles & goals, as defined, were in conflict with new business development. Joss conceded there was some inherent conflict between Smart Growth and the imperatives of economic development in the state, but that in the long run he felt that adopting the principles of smart growth would enhance and complement economic development. He noted studies that show unrestricted commercial development often increases costs to communities, rather than reducing tax burdens by increasing the value of the grand list.

Max P asked what does work to reduce property taxes. Joss said a focus on 'in-fill' development, re-using or re-developing existing buildings & infrastructure within town & village centers, is a more cost-effective way to expand the property tax base.

Bill H asked how towns like Morristown could implement Smart Growth principles in their development plans. Faith Ingulsrud said it takes a series of small steps. She said the shift to Smart Growth is a long, complex process which requires foresight & patience from both municipal planners and private property owners. She recognized that the process may be initially more costly to implement and presents more challenges to developers & business owners, but that the results are worth the extra efforts. She said demographic changes (a graying population) will help steer some of these changes.

Lauren noted that many property owners of properties that are likely candidates for Smart Growth re-development are often reluctant to embrace the process and that the town & state needs to have some way to incentivize these individuals.

Faith gave a presentation on highway interchange design schemes, on e of which was similar to the issues associated with the Route 100 corridor. Bill H asked how do Smart Growth principles fit with our discussions about potential re-zoning along the Route 100 corridor. Faith said that state policy supports compacts, village-like development, with large areas of open land between village or town centers. As much as any Route 100 re-zoning might encourage new commercial development in what is currently a largely rural & residential area it may run afoul of state land use policy. She added that Growth Center designation can also apply to 'nodes' outside of established village centers; the area around the airport might constitute such a node.

Joss asked what were the growth projections for this area. Bill R said Morristown is in the middle range for Lamoille County, with the county sharing top growth rate projections statewide.

Bill H asked if Morristown was a good candidate for Growth Center designation. Faith said it is, but that it is a long, costly process with benefits coming slowly. She said the main benefits of Growth Center designation were somewhat streamline Act 250 review criteria and the possibility of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) for approved projects. She said so far only about six towns had received Growth Center designation, with several more in the application pipeline. At this point, she did not think there was funding for TIF for those towns.

Joss mentioned the concept of 'down-zoning', raising residential lot size densities, in rural areas as a means of preserving open space and encouraging more compact residential development in established village boundaries.

Turning to the question of retail store size limits, Bill explained the PC's efforts to establish a 75,000-square foot cap in the latest zoning revisions, only to have the idea rejected by the Select Board. He asked how other towns had fared with such a provision. Joss said it had been tried in Benington, only to be overturned in a petitioned vote. He said large retail establishments obviously compete with existing retail & commercial uses in the established village center, despite claims by some that the big stores also increase business for the smaller ones.

Bill R asked what impacts might be expected with the possible completion of the alternate truck route (i.e., the bypass). Joss said the Town & Village would have to pro-actively develop plans & projects to attract drivers into the Village from the bypass. Signage, gateways, & careful zoning around bypass interchanges can help steer visitors to existing village businesses.

Bill R advised that the subject of the next meeting (November 17th) will be a discussion with Smart Growth Collaborative representatives on the same topics as this evening's discussions.

On a motion by Lauren, seconded by Max, minutes of the October 20, 2009 meeting were reviewed and accepted as presented.

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted:
Mark Leonard

Minutes approved on: 11/17/09