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**MORRISTOWN/MORRISVILLE
PLANNING COMMISSION
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Minutes of October 7, 2008

Members Present: Bill Henchey, Andrew Volansky, Steve Berson, Kelly Rogers

Members Absent: John Meyer, Max Paine

Staff: Mark Leonard (Morristown ZA), Bill Rossmasler (LCPC Planner)

Guests: see attached sign-in sheets

Chairman Bill Henchey called meeting to order at 7:00 pm and reviewed the agenda. He asked the ZA to give an overview of the background and current proposals for changes in the Business Office Park (BOP) zoning district.

Heather Sargent, representing the Morristown Alliance for Culture & Commerce (MACC) explained that its members, and many members of the general public (as evidenced by the large turnout), were concerned that including retail sales among the allowable uses in the BOP would be to the detriment of MACC's efforts to revitalize the downtown village and support existing retail businesses in the village. She presented a letter signed by nearly 200 residents opposing the inclusion of retail in the BOP.

Penny Ducharme gave a PowerPoint presentation outlining MACC's view that the inclusion of retail in the BOP is not consistent with goals contained in the Town Plan. A copy of the presentation is attached to these minutes. She supported MACC's position by citing results from last year's community survey (copy attached).

Jay Caroli gave an overview of downtown buildings, highlighting recent renovations and new businesses. He identified other buildings that presented opportunities for further improvements and enhancements in the village.

Paul Trudell spoke about a similar downtown visioning effort launched in the early 1990s, saying much of the recent work is the fruition of that vision, which also sought to preserve and enhance the viability of the village center.

Alex Garvin asked if the BOP property owners had specific requests from businesses to build either a movie theater or restaurant in the BOP. The ZA said he was not aware of any such requests.

Dawn Andrews said she came to Morristown 25 years ago to work on downtown development and noted good progress over the years on this ongoing and necessary effort. She presented a letter (copy attached) objecting to a number of the proposed BOP changes, in particular allowing retail and restaurants in this district, citing the potential adverse impacts on existing businesses in the village area.

Mike Stafford spoke about existing and planned recreational trails within the BOP and adjacent Clark Park area (across the river, next to the sewer plant). He urged the Planning Commission to stick with its original vision for the BOP and to work on getting the necessary infrastructure to realize that vision.

Theresa Breault questioned why we would consider allowing retail uses in the BOP when some retail shops in the village are struggling and there is available retail space in both the village and North End areas.

Bill H explained that the PC had not initiated this proposal, but was responding to requests from BOP property owners to provide more flexibility in the uses allowed in the BOP in order to offer more opportunity for them to develop their properties as they see appropriate and compatible with other allowed uses in the district.

Hank Glowiak said he came to Morristown to get away from urban development. He recently moved his bike shop down to Bridge Street and fears that any expansion of retail to other areas would hurt his and other village businesses.

Heather Sargent, noting that the original vision for the BOP was patterned in part on the Timberlane development in South Burlington, said there is no retail in Timberlane and it is a very attractive development that does not compete with nearby retail areas.

Kevin Lane spoke about how he tries to do all his shopping locally and can generally get what he needs. He said it is important to support existing business owners, who have invested a lot of time, money, and effort in their businesses. He cited the current economic conditions as even more reason to support local small businesses.

Paul Trudell said that the downtown village is in the traditional Vermont development model. The retail shops and restaurants form an important part of the visual impact of the downtown area; empty storefronts detract from that impact.

Bill H asked those opposing retail in the BOP if they were OK with factory outlet stores within any future industrial buildings that might go in the BOP. Most said so long as the store was clearly subordinate to the industrial use and was limited to products made on the premises that would be OK.

Dana Wildes provided an overview of the sewer system expansion and discussed how it might impact development in the BOP. He said it did not make sense to develop the BOP using on-site sewage disposal systems, as these encumber land that could be better used for other purposes.

Jim Pease talked about how infrastructure had helped provide for retail uses on the North End. Even with sewer & water on site, the former Ames retail store sat empty for a long time, making the point that even if there is the necessary infrastructure, it was hard to find a retailer for that space. He suggested that the Town could bond for the money to expand the sewer lines throughout the Commercial and Industrial districts.

Steve Rae said that MACC and other groups interested in preserving and enhancing the downtown village need to talk with BOP property owners and find common solutions that address both groups' legitimate concerns.

Steve Berson said everyone wants to see the downtown stay vibrant, but that many of the currently available retail properties are not viable without money for improvements and upgrades.

Turning to the Commercial & Industrial district review, the ZA outlined the current district boundaries and uses. Bill H asked why adding health care facilities was under consideration. The ZA said several property owners in the Commercial area had spoken to him about including this as a specific use in the district, apart from the generic 'other commercial uses' that are allowed there. Heidi Krantz added that a market analysis done several years ago identified health care businesses that complement or augment the services offered by Copley Hospital as a 'niche' for Morrisville.

Dana Wildes and Leah Hollenberger, speaking on behalf of Copley, said they did not feel the area could support competing health care facilities. Theresa Breault also opposed the idea.

Bill H noted that 'business & professional offices' are currently allowed in the Commercial district and that this could encompass various health-care related activities.

Jennifer Desautels of Trudell Consulting presented a proposal on behalf of their client CCS Development Corporation on possible zoning changes affecting the former Langdell Farm property. The proposal calls for expanding the Commercial District boundary from the corner of the property on Route 15 and Center Road to include approximately half of the parcel that currently lies within the adjoining Rural residential with Agriculture (RRA) district. It also requests that residential uses be included in the list of allowable uses in the Commercial district in order to allow mixed uses in a Planned Unit Development (PUD).

Bill H indicated the PC would look favorably on the district boundary expansion, but would likely expand it further to include the entire Langdell parcel so as not to have the current situation where a portion of the parcel lies in the Commercial district and the remainder is in the RRA district. He favors mixed residential and commercial development in this area, but wants to consider provisions that control or manage the density and aesthetics of any such development.

Barb Damon said she hoped any mixed use PUD in this area would include an affordable or senior housing component. Ms Desautels said the CCS proposal specifically calls for such a component.

Jim Pease noted there are existing stormwater drainage problems in the North End area and any development on the Langdell property would face serious challenges in overcoming these problem.

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Lacking a quorum of members present on September 16, 2008, approval of the minutes of that meeting was deferred to the next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 9:15 PM.

Respectfully submitted:
Mark Leonard

Minutes approved on:

10/21/08

Atch:

Meeting Agenda
Meeting Attendance sheets (2)
MACC presentation
Community survey extract
Dawn Andrews letter
Trudell Consulting Engineers letter