

Morristown/Morrisville Planning Council
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Meeting Minutes of Tuesday 25 August 2020

Council Members Present: Allen Van Anda, Steven Foster, Etienne Hancock (Chair), and Tom Snipp

Council Members Absent: Joshua Goldstein

Guests: Jane & Brent Paine, Abbie Harrington, Kristi Flanders, Diane & Marc Cote, Paul Griswold, Conservation Commission members Jim Pease, and (Chair) Ron Stancliff

Staff: Planning Director Todd Thomas

Call to Order: Chair Hancock called the meeting to order adjacent to the mailbox of 223 Goddard Nisbet Road at approximately 6:02 P.M.

Discussion: Conservation Commission proposal for 10 acre minimum lot sizes –

Chair Hancock thanked members of the public in attendance for joining the planned site walk of the Goddard Nisbet area. He reminded everyone that a decision about the Conservation Commission's 10 acre minimum lot size proposal for the foothill of Elmore Mountain would not be made at the site walk, but at the regular portion of the Planning Council that followed (held under the tent adjacent to the clubhouse of Copley Country Club). Marc Cote asked the Council Members present what was different from the current zoning change proposal, compared to the rezoning proposal that most of this neighborhood has spoken out against it last fall. Zoning Administrator Thomas said that proposal was unchanged. Abbie Harrington said the Conservation Commission's zoning change would impact her property and she was opposed to it. She said that the zoning change would have the effect of prohibiting young people, like herself, from being able to afford to buy land in this area. She added that if the zoning change were approved, it would ensure that her and her husband would remain the only young people in this neighborhood. Jim Pease spoke on behalf of the proposed zoning change, stating that less development in this area would lead to less environmental degradation. Brent Paine said that increasing the minimum lot size to 10 acres would likely prevent him from giving his child a 2-acre house lot. He added that maintaining a 10 acre lot required a lot of work. Member Foster said that the Council, at its regular meeting after the site walk, will discuss proposed changes to §340, Environmental Resource Areas, of the Zoning Bylaws. Mr. Thomas explained that this alternative approach would require Conditional Use review of development town-wide on more than a 20% slope, and that there was currently no steep slope protection in the Zoning Bylaws (outside of §510 Conservation Subdivisions). Marc Cote said that this kind of slope regulation was not needed because land regulated itself. He said that people would not spend the money needed to convert the truly steep sections of Elmore Mountain into home sites, but that there were many natural plateaus on the mountain that could be developable with simple driveway grading. Paul Griswold said that this zoning change would prohibit the development of additional high value homes, have a negative impact on assessed values in this neighborhood, and negatively impact the town's tax base. Chair Hancock thanked people for their comments and invited everyone to the Country Club where the Planning Council would discuss and likely vote on the Conservation Commission zoning change proposal.

After a brief recess, allowing people to drive from Goddard Nisbet Road down to the Country Club, the 10 acre minimum lot size discussion ensued under the white tent adjacent to the clubhouse at approximately 6:40 PM. Conservation Commission Chair Ron Stancliff joined the meeting to discuss his zoning change proposal. Chair Hancock said that the discussion should begin with the Conservation Commission's letter. Mr. Stancliff, spoke to the letter, and said that larger minimum lot sizes would protect the foothill of Elmore Mountain from additional development. Mr. Griswold said he believed Mr. Stancliff's proposal was spot zoning. Member Van Anda said he was interested in more of a town-wide proposal to protect steep slopes, not just enacting more strict zoning controls on a single neighborhood. Member Foster agreed, and said that is why the town-wide, but site-specific, Development Review Board process that would be required for development on steep slopes in the revised §340 of the Zoning Bylaws appealed to him. After a brief discussion, all of the Members agreed that that the Council should look town-wide at steep slopes before moving forward with the currently proposed 20% plus threshold in §340. Mr. Thomas said he would provide some town-wide slope maps, as well as some third party analysis of what is actually considered a "steep" slope for the September 22nd Planning Council meeting. Member Foster moved that the Council should take-up the proposed revisions to §340 of the Zoning Bylaws. A vote of 4-0 affirmed the motion. Member Foster moved to approve the Conservation Commission's 10 acre minimum lot size zoning proposal for the foothill of Elmore Mountain. The motion failed to carry with no votes in favor.

Discussion: Prior meeting minutes – Member Foster moved to approve the August 11th meeting minutes. A vote of 4-0 affirmed the motion.

Discuss: Zoning change Legislative Body hearings – Mr. Thomas, and Member Snipp related that that Village Trustee zoning change hearing went well, and no public attended.

Discuss: Housing Chapter of the Town Plan – Mr. Thomas presented a new draft Housing Chapter for the 2020-2030 Town Plan. The Council spoke about new housing production, and where in town it should go. Time was given to discussing the rapidly shrinking US household size, especially compared to the typical multi-bedroom housing inventory that exists locally, as well as the amount of new housing production that would have to take place just to keep current population levels. New affordability problems for both rental and ownership housing that appeared for the first time with this plan update were also discussed. Mr. Thomas was directed to make various changes to this draft chapter for the next Council meeting, including adding Member Van Anda's strong support for an assisted living facility (located within a short distance to Copley Hospital).

Discuss: §840.8 Fire Protection for Major Subdivisions – Mr. Thomas said that the fire protection for major subdivision discussion needed to be tabled until he could obtain a desired minimum volume for fire ponds from the Fire Chief.

The meeting adjourned at 7:15 PM, submitted by Todd Thomas, Planning Director