MORRISTOWN/MORRISVILLE
PLANNING COMMISSION
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Minutes of August 20, 2002

Members Present: Julia Compagna, Kevin Lane, Bruce Tomlinson, Sam Guy

Members Absent: Bill Bourne, Kelly Rogers, Bill Henchey

Recorder: Mark Leonard, Zoning Administrator

Guests: Mike Miller (LCPC Planner), Steve Bousquet (Lamoille Area Board of Realtors)

Julia called the meeting to order at 7:10PM

The topic for this evening's Town Plan review is Housing. Steve Bousquet, president of the Lamoille Area Board of Realtors broadly addressed housing needs in the area. The biggest challenge, he said, was a shortage of affordable housing, which he defined as in the $100-150,000 range. This need is recognized nationwide and Morristown is no exception. Any new listing in this range sells quickly. He suggested a goal should be to help renters become homeowners

Barriers to creating more affordable housing were discussed. Minimum lot size requirements (currently 2 acres in all areas outside the village) can drive costs up. The need for on-site water and wastewater systems also adds costs. Builders can typically increase their profits by building larger, more expensive homes, rather than homes in the "affordable" range. Developments such as Jersey Heights were originally envisioned as affordable housing, but prices have risen above that range.

Board members discussed ideas to increase or maintain the inventory of affordable housing. One option could be to mandate that a percentage of units in Planned Residential Developments (PRDs) be set aside for affordable housing. A less coercive option might be to encourage developers to set aside some number of units by allowing density bonuses. A parcel which might have a maximum number of, say, ten units, could be allowed to add two more units if the developer agreed to price those units in the affordable range. Another alternative was to revisit the density allowances in the village zoning districts, possibly increasing the number of units allowed on a given lot size. Other options mentioned included mixed income development where 2-unit designs were included in new housing construction. This could boost some new homebuyers' loan qualification by providing rental income. The board could also consider expanding the definition of "accessory apartment" to allow owner-occupied homes to create a separate rental apartment where the lot size requirement would not otherwise allow. This would increase the affordability of the primary home and add affordable rental housing. By requiring owner occupation of the primary residence, you could avoid or minimize tenant problems associated with some absentee landlords. Another option would be to encourage well-planned and maintained mobile home parks. The Sterling View mobile home park in Hyde Park was cited as a good example.

Kevin stated that the plan should address ways to encourage use of existing residential space in the downtown village area. A number of apartments above storefronts are currently unused. The renovation of apartments above the new post office was cited as a recent success in this regard. Steve Bousquet suggested converting some units to condominiums, which would provide another ownership option.

Mike Miller did a brief review of the Community Profile section. He stated that the format would remain basically as is and would be updated with the 2000 Census data. He provided a draft of the Economic Development section for the board's review.

Review and approval of the August 6 meeting was deferred due to a lack of a quorum present at that meeting. The next meeting will be on September 17, 2002 at the Water & Light Department building, addressing the Community Facilities, Utilities, & Services section of the town plan.

Sam moved to adjourn and Julia seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Mark Leonard, recorder