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MORRISTOWN/MORRISVILLE
PLANNING COMMISSION
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Minutes of July 19, 2005

Members Present: Richard Duda, John Meyer, , Bill Henchy, Steve Benson, Andrew Volansky, Kelly Rogers

Members Absent: Bruce Tomlinson

Guests: none

Recorder: Mark Leonard, Zoning Administrator (ZA)

Bill called the meeting to order at 7:05 PM. Minutes of the July 5, 2005 meeting were reviewed and approved.

Mark updated the members on the recent presentation by AOT and LCPC representatives to the Morristown Alliance for Culture & Commerce (MACC) on the current status of the proposed Route 100 Bypass. AOT is moving into the right-of-way acquisition stage, which they estimate will take 18-24 months to complete provided that there are no legal challenges to any of the property acquisitions. AOT will be setting up a part-time office in one of the properties already acquired to handle dealing with property owners. Once completed, AOT will begin the contracting phase, with a current estimated construction start in Spring 2008.

Andrew raised the subject of whether the town should adopt size limits on any new retail facilities. He reiterated his statement from the previous meeting that the issue should be discussed and decided before the town is faced with such a project.

Bill was concerned that setting a size limit might discourage any large retailer from considering Morristown. He noted the need for a general retailer and the apparent inability of the former Ames store's property owner to attract a suitable replacement. He suggested inviting the property owner to speak with the Commission on the subject as well as having the Commission contact and/or visit other communities who have recently faced this issue.

Richard said it was important to look at the need for a general retailer from the broader view of Morristown and the surrounding towns who come here for their shopping needs.

Kelly said she would much prefer to work to find a retailer to use the existing space in the Morrisville Plaza rather than see an entirely new site developed.

Steve felt the Commission needed to be educated on all the pros and cons of a large retailer coming into town. He said we need specific information on how such stores impact the existing smaller stores.

Mark mentioned that there are several groups who actively work to limit the impact on communities from large retailers and who have information on the potential negative impacts from them. Obviously, such information only addresses one side of the issue.

Members generally discussed how to engage the public in this discussion and to gauge public sentiment. Email, mass mailings, the town web site (www.morristownvt.org) and a public forum were all identified as ways to reach out for information and feedback. Mark will contact the *News & Citizen* to see if they will run an article on the topic.

Mark presented a list of bylaw review items for discussion. Based on the previous meeting's decision not to consider creating a new zoning district that would allow more commercial activities, he suggested that the Commission consider using the broader 'commercial use' definition in place of specific types of commercial uses in the Commercial District and also allowing 'commercial use' as a conditional use in the Industrial District. There was considerable discussion among the members on possible impacts of these changes, but no consensus was reached on adopting or rejecting the suggestion.

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Members agreed to change the threshold for requiring a zoning permit for ponds from 50,000 cubic feet of capacity, which Mark said was very difficult to determine, to 5,000 square feet of surface area. They also agreed to define the dimensions of a parking space, using Stowe's definition of 9 feet wide by 18 feet long. The current definition was deemed vague and difficult to quantify on site plans and permit applications.

On the subject of internally illuminated signs, Mark said the current bylaws are confusing and difficult to enforce. He suggested changing the bylaws to allow such signs in both the Commercial District, as currently allowed, and in the Central Business District and to restrict their use to the hours the business advertised is open or no later than 10:00 PM in both districts. He also suggested removing the requirement that internally illuminated signs have light lettering on a dark background, noting that nearly all such existing signs are the opposite.

Members felt that internally illuminated signs should be discouraged in all commercially zoned districts. While existing signs are 'grandfathered', they proposed to ban any new internally illuminated signs in the Commercial District, the only district where they are currently allowed, and strictly enforce the prohibition on such signs in all other districts. They agreed to amend the operating hours for legally permitted internally illuminated signs to the hours the business advertised is open or no later than 10:00 PM.

New definitions for Building Trades and Shoreline were reviewed and accepted. Building Trades would be added to the list of conditional uses allowed in the Industrial District.

On a motion by Steve, seconded by Richard, the meeting was adjourned at 9:20 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Mark Leonard, recorder

Minutes approved on: 8/2/05 AV/KR