

Morristown/Morrisville Planning Commission

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Meeting Minutes of June 18, 2013

Planning Commission Members Present: Paul Griswold (Chair), Etienne Hancock, Tom Snipp & Mark Struhsacker. Member Andrea Caldwell was also present but had to leave after the initial Bijou Theater signage discussion.

Planning Commission Members Absent: Reeves Larson & Max Paine

Staff: Todd Thomas, Zoning Administrator & Planner

Guests: Ron Stancliff, Chair of the Conservation Commission

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at approximately 7:05 P.M.

Approve prior meeting minutes – Member Snipp moved to approve the June 4 meeting minutes. A vote of 4-0-1 affirmed the motion, with Member Griswold abstaining.

Discussion: Signage for the Bijou Theatre – Zoning Administrator Thomas said that the owners of the theater could not participate in tonight's discussion due to a scheduling conflict. Chair Griswold said that he did not like crafting a sign zoning exemption that is specific to a certain business. Member Griswold asked to move this agenda item to the end of the meeting so it could be discussed more generically and at greater length.

Discussion: Conservation Commission conserved land – Conservation Commission Chair Ron Stancliff appeared before the Board continuing the discussion about what land in Morristown was actually conserved. Mr. Stancliff provided the Board with maps showing land development limitations across Town. Mr. Stancliff said that he believes the only land in Morristown that is actually conserved is the Lepine property and some additional acreage owned by the Stowe Land Trust. Mr. Stancliff added that natural development restrictions prohibit many additional acres from being developed. Chair Griswold agreed and said that is why it was so important to have the inventory of conserved lands that the Conservation Commission is charged with keeping in its bylaws. Member Hancock said that he is not sure of what fits into the definition of conserved land. Mr. Thomas said that a discussion on what land is conserved is premature until a definition is agreed upon for "conserved." Mr. Thomas added that he thought the Conservation Commission was the most appropriate body to arrive at the definition for conserved land and opined that the Planning Commission was really just interested in looking at the data output for what ended up being considered conserved. Member Hancock said that the Planning Commission will not be able to answer Village Trustee Ed DeBor's challenge of the percentage of land zoned for business use versus conservation without agreeing on a definition for conserved. Mr. Stancliff said that the Planning Commission and the Conservation Commission appear to be at an impasse regarding the definition of conserved land. Member Griswold suggested sending this issue back to the Selectboard since that body asked the Planning Commission and the Conservation Commission to work on this issue together.

Discussion: BE Zone Proposed Changes – Mr. Thomas led the Commission through the proposed changes to the Business Enterprise Zone, as originally prepared approximately 18 months ago. Mr. Thomas noted that the proposed changes significantly improve the existing zone, but thought that more positive changes were possible with additional language changes. He said that the proposed changes to the bylaw for the zone eliminated the restriction on metal buildings in favor of simply requiring a high-quality building façade. He added that the revised Business Enterprise Zone was designed to appear less dense from the road, as evidenced by the required 100 foot front setback and the requirement that 25% of the parcel remain its naturally vegetated state or landscaped. Mr. Thomas added that the proposed bylaw was very prescriptive, set a high bar for development and created a distinct vision for the built environment therein. He suggested that if the Commission wanted to create a high bar for development with a distinct vision, it should consider making more uses permitted and not conditional. He added that if you are asking a developer to do something very specific and they propose a project that meets expectations, why not let them move forward with it, as opposed to having them go to a hearing. He added that developers often try to avoid projects with hearings due to the three-month delay, higher soft costs for permitting and the hearing subjecting the developer to more permit risk.

Discussion: BE vs. IND Zoning for the Trombley Hill Water Tank Parcel – Mr. Thomas segued from the Business Enterprise Zone discussion into a more general zoning discussion regarding the proposed new business zone on the Village's Trombley Hill water tank parcel. Mr. Thomas asked Commission members if they thought the appearance of development on the Village water tank parcel should be more regulated, like what is required in the Business Enterprise Zone or left more to the vision of the developer and the Development Review Board, which is what takes place in the Industrial Zone (which does not have any design review criteria therein). Chair Griswold said that he thought developers of properties in the Industrial Zone have done a pretty good job in meeting the community's expectations for good development. Mr. Thomas noted that there were also private covenants that regulated the development in the industrial park. The Commission members discussed if they thought it was necessary to regulate what buildings may look like on the water tank parcel. Mr. Thomas said that it was important to get that area residents' opinion on what development on Trombley Hill should look like before a vision is formed the area. Mr. Thomas suggested and the Commission agreed to have the public in for an informal discussion of the Trombley Hill water tank development at the Commission's August 6 meeting.

Discussion: Proposed general changes to the sign bylaw – Chair Griswold said that he would like to have Nicole Gilbert from Great Big Graphics in to speak to the Planning Commission about signage. Paul said that he wants our sign bylaw to be more business friendly. The Commission again discussed the issue with the Bijou Theater's internally lit window signage being turned off. A majority of the Commission decided that it should add an exemption for internally lit non-animated business signs in windows in business districts. Mr. Thomas said that he would have this proposal written up for the Commission at its next meeting. Member Griswold said he would also like to invite John Mandeville in from the Lamoille Economic Development Corporation to speak about the

development of the Trombley Hill water tank parcel and other economic development issues in Town. Mr. Thomas said that he would try to schedule Mr. Mandeville to come in before the Commission at its July 16 meeting.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:00 PM – submitted by Todd Thomas, ZA

