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MORRISTOWN/MORRISVILLE
PLANNING COMMISSION
P.O. BOX 748
MORRISVILLE, VT 05661
Phone (802) 888-6373
Fax (802) 888-6378

Minutes of April 3, 2007

Members Present: Bill Henchey, John Meyer, Andrew Volansky, Richard Duda, Kelly Rogers, Lauren Traister

Members Absent: Steve Berson

Guests: Select Board members Steve Bousquet, Todd Yando, & Brian Kellogg; Village Trustees Ed Debor & Dana Wildes; Town Administrator Dave Crawford; Conservation Commissioners Steve Rae, Amy Walker; Community Coordinator Heidi Krantz; LCPC planner Mike Miller

Recorder: Mark Leonard, Zoning Administrator (ZA)

Chairman Bill Henchey called the meeting to order at 7:05 PM. He welcomed the Select Board members and Village Trustees and explained the Planning Commission's intent in holding this joint meeting. With the Town Plan revision process underway, the PC wanted to review the work done to date and discuss the upcoming reviews of the Economic Development and Land Use chapters in order to avoid any major disagreements at the end of the process. Mark provided an overview of the Town Plan revision process and timeline for completion by next March.

Heidi Krantz informed all present that the community planning survey was mailed out to all persons on the Grand List on March 28th and articles in the local newspapers informed the public it was available online, with a requested return date of not later than April 30th.

Village Trustee Dana Wildes stated that his view that any economic development was tied to plans to extend the village sewer system outside the village boundaries and to expand the sewer plant's treatment capacity. He noted upcoming bond votes for plant expansion, system metering, and water system improvements, particularly in the Elmore Street area that has a low water pressure problem. Under the previously proposed Town Sewer Service Agreement (TSSA), the town is seeking an allocation of 100K gallons per day (gpd) of capacity for users outside the village boundaries. The plant currently has only 23K gpd of remaining allocation. The proposed plant expansion would increase capacity from 450K gpd to 625K gpd. While the system capacity would increase to that figure, limits on phosphorus discharge would restrict the system to 550K gpd.

Bill said that the Planning Commission did not want to add new commercially zoned areas without some assurance that such areas would have access to the municipal sewer system. This necessarily limited such expansion to areas adjacent to the existing limits of the system. He noted that plans to add sewer plant capacity did not address the question of how and where to extend the sewer lines or, perhaps more importantly, who would pay for these line extensions. Currently, users outside the village bear the burden of paying for sewer line extensions to their property.

Selectman Todd Yando said he believed there was a need for a new industrially zoned area that would have municipal water & sewer service to allow current businesses to expand and for new businesses to set up in town. The question to resolve is where should that be. Bill said any such new zoning district would require an upfront commitment by the town that sewer service, and the necessary system infrastructure, would be provided under some sort of funding arrangement so that businesses would be confident of obtaining these utilities and so that creation of a new zoning district could take such utilities into account.

Steve Rae asked if there was any evidence or data to support the assumption that commercial and industrial growth actually results in a positive outcome (expanded tax base, good jobs, etc.) that could offset any adverse environmental impacts.

Trustees Ed Debor and Dana Wildes both expressed their strong belief that there needs to be more non-residentially zoned (i.e., commercial & industrial) areas to allow the town to grow and its economy to support the public's needs for jobs and expanded tax base. Ed said that only about 1-3% of the total area of the town is zoned

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for non-residential uses, which he feels is far too little to support the town's economic development needs. They said they would like to see more flexibility and elasticity in the zoning bylaws for non-residential uses. Selectman Steve Bousquet agreed with this view.

Town Administrator Dave Crawford said that not only must the land be zoned for non-residential use, but it must be suitable for such development and available for sale. He noted that many businesses did not want to lease land, preferring instead to own the property. Lacking that, they would look elsewhere to establish their business.

Bill stated that the most recent bylaw revision removed barriers between commercial and industrial uses in the Commercial and Industrial zoning districts which should allow for more flexibility in these districts without creating new non-residential zoning districts. He added that he hoped the results of the survey that had just been fielded would give the PC a broader view of the community's feelings about commercial and industrial development.

Richard said he wanted to see broad, diverse types of commercial uses in appropriate areas to address the community's perceived need for continued economic development. He said no growth was not a viable position.

Ed Debor expressed reservations about establishing Design Review Standards for commercial developments, voicing concern that such standards could inhibit development and cause property owners to avoid improving their property if they were required to meet some arbitrary standard of what someone felt was a 'good' design or appearance.

On the subject of housing, Dana Wildes said the Town Plan and subsequent zoning changes should emphasize incentives for developers to build affordable housing, rather than impose requirements or restrictions that could increase the cost of housing. By 'affordable', he meant housing priced for middle-income households, not low-income subsidized housing. He mentioned allowing density bonuses for new subdivisions as one tool to do this.

Bill thanked the Selectmen and Trustees for sharing their views with the PC and encouraged them to remain engaged in the Town Plan revision process to avoid any major disagreements at the end of the process. He reminded them that the hearings on the Economic Development and Land Use chapters, scheduled in May-June and Sept-Oct, respectively, would be the best opportunity for all segments of the community to weigh in on these issues.

Mike Miller briefly reviewed the current Education chapter and updates on enrollment and costs provided by the Morristown School District. No changes to the current goals, policies, or recommendations were proposed.

On a motion by Andrew, seconded by John, minutes of the March 20th meeting were approved.

The meeting adjourned at 9:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Mark Leonard, recorder

Minutes approved on: 4/17/07 BH/SM