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MORRISTOWN/MORRISVILLE
PLANNING COMMISSION
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Minutes of March 20, 2007

Members Present: Bill Henchey, John Meyer, Andrew Volansky, Richard Duda, Kelly Rogers, Steve Berson

Members Absent: Lauren Traister

Guests: Community Coordinator Heidi Krantz, , Conservation Commission chairman Steve Rae, Dawn Andrews, David Rafael, Ken Gibbons, Paul Grogan

Recorder: Mark Leonard, Zoning Administrator (ZA)

Chairman Bill Henchey called the meeting to order at 7:10 PM. Minutes of the Feb 6, Feb 13, and Feb 20 meetings were reviewed and accepted as presented. Members reviewed and approved a memo to the Town Select Board and Village Trustees inviting them to the April 3 meeting to review progress to date on the Town Plan revision and discuss the upcoming reviews of the Economic Development and Land Use chapters.

Heidi Krantz presented a draft of the community survey for final review. Bill asked whether the question of what uses should be allowed within the Business Office Park (BOP) should be included. It was decided instead to amplify the discussion of 'commercial uses' within several of the questions. Andrew asked that questions posed in a previous survey regarding retail store size limits be incorporated in this survey.

Union Bank president Ken Gibbons presented building elevations for their planned exterior renovations of the former Centennial Block building on the corner of Main and Portland Streets. The renovations are intended to restore the look of the building to its former appearance. Ken added that the bank hoped this project would encourage other downtown property owners to restore or maintain the historic appearance of their properties. He said the project should be completed by October. Board members were unanimous in their praise for the project.

The ZA explained that the project does not require DRB or PC approval, but that the bank wished to afford the Planning Commission the opportunity to review their plans. Bill, while commending Union Bank's plans, noted the fact that this type of renovations did not require any type of board review is why the PC is considering establishing some type of design review requirements. He said other property owners might not be as interested as the Union Bank in investing in maintaining the historic character of the downtown area.

David Rafael of LandWorks reviewed the draft Design Review Standards (DRS) and handbook with examples he had developed. He said that it was now up to the PC to decide if or when to adopt these recommendations and incorporate them into the zoning bylaws. Andrew asked what types of projects would require design review; David said all projects within a designated design review district would require review.

Bill asked who would perform the design review, a separate advisory board or the DRB. David said it could be an existing board or a new body. He suggested having an advisory board that would make recommendations to the DRB, as the DRB has the statutory authority to review and approve zoning applications. He added that the PC could be designated as the Design Review Advisory Board, as he has seen in other towns.

Richard voiced some concern that, while he favored the concept, DRS could stifle redevelopment. Bill felt that there could be some exceptions to standards to allow for unique circumstances or projects, giving the DRB some discretion to address such situations.

Dawn Andrews said that while she agrees that design review can have a positive result, she is concerned that standards can be too prescriptive, limiting their usefulness. She favored more focus on values and desired outcomes from the design review process rather than prescriptive standards. She said the authors of design review standards cannot foresee every type of application or situation and therefore may have the effect of proscribing something that may, in fact, be consistent with the goals and values of those standards.

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Steve Rae agreed with Dawn's comments and added that he would like to see design review standards phased in under some sort of transitional arrangement, starting out with voluntary compliance with identified standards and evolving into mandatory compliance as the public comes to understand and appreciate the purpose and benefits of these requirements. Andrew suggested perhaps adopting interim standards, to be applied over a 1-3 year transitional period, during which a project would be subject to a non-binding design review.

The ZA reminded David that the scope of work for his contract called for a public education component to explain what design review is, why it benefits the community, and how it will be implemented. He asked when that task was going to be undertaken. He advised that there needed to be buy-in by the Select Board, Village Trustees, and MACC (Morristown Alliance for Culture & Commerce).

Turning back to the Housing chapter of the Town Plan, Dawn Andrews requested that the current policy regarding mobile home parks be amended to call for 'adequate water & sewer services' rather than requiring such parks to be connected to the municipal water & sewer systems. She felt this would open up more of the town area to this type of affordable housing.

The ZA presented a draft memo from the PC to the DRB conveying the PC's views on the pending Pope Meadow subdivision. The board accepted the memo as written and Bill signed it.

Andrew asked to update the PC on the status of the Town Offices Steering Committee's work at the next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 9:45 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Mark Leonard, recorder

Minutes approved on: 4/3/07