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MORRISTOWN/MORRISVILLE
PLANNING COMMISSION
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Minutes of February 20, 2007

Members Present: Bill Henchy, John Meyer, Andrew Volansky

Members Absent: Richard Duda, Lauren Traister, Kelly Rogers, Steve Berson

Guests: Ed DeBor, Ken Harvey, Sam Guy, Mike Roussell, Karen Lynch, Mike Miller

Recorder: Mark Leonard, Zoning Administrator (ZA)

Chairman Bill Henchy called the meeting to order at 7:10 PM. Agenda for the meeting was to discuss possible zoning changes in the Business Office Park (BOP) district and review the Energy section of the Town Plan.

Sam Guy, who had served on the Planning Commission when the BOP district was originally created in 1998, outlined its history. Based on a 1997 Growth Center study, the Planning Commission identified a need for additional industrial space to meet the town's economic development needs. This would require creating a new non-residential zoning district. The area just to the south and west of the village boundary, bounded by Bridge Street on the north end and Route 100 on the south, was identified as the most desirable for this type of development. Sam said the PC at the time envisioned an industrial park, but faced vocal opposition from several parties in town. The PC opted instead to create a business office park, with offices, business services, and light industry as the primary conditional use allowed within it.

Ed Debor, who owns two of the parcels in the BOP district, presented an information packet outlining the currently available commercially zoned areas, the need for additional commercially zoned areas and impacts of not meeting this need, and a proposal to expand the list of uses that could be allowed within the district to include all uses currently allowed in the Commercial zoning district. The proposal also calls for expanding the district boundaries to the north of Bridge Street to take in the 26-acre CREW property. Ed noted that the district's location outside the central village area would likely mean little or no increase in truck traffic through the village as most truck traffic for the district would be coming from the south.

Speaking for the Bishop Marshall School Board of Trustees, Board chair Mike Roussell explained that the school, through its development arm (Good Steward Foundation) is planning to develop the open land that it owns opposite the school facilities as a business and office enterprise park to generate revenue for the school's benefit. While the uses currently allowed in the district encompass many of the types of prospective tenants for this development, the school board feels that their ability to fully realize the project's potential would be enhanced if there were more flexibility in the zoning of this area. BOP property owners need this flexibility in order to confidently invest in and develop the necessary infrastructure required for the Planning Commission's original vision for this district to be finally realized. The school supports the proposal to allow the BOP district to have the same uses currently allowed in the Commercial district. He added that the school, as landlord to any prospective tenant businesses, would ensure that such operations were appropriate, given their proximity to the school itself. As conditional uses, the DRB would also be able to determine the appropriateness of any given commercial use proposed.

Bill asked what uses not currently allowed would those BOP property owners present like to see added. Mike listed retail/wholesale goods & services, restaurants, communications facilities, and other commercial uses. Bill expressed his concern that allowing unrestricted commercial uses within the BOP could lead to undesirable types of businesses and sprawl in this area. He mentioned gas stations, fast food restaurants, and 'big box' retail stores as examples of undesirable uses in what is regarded as the southern 'gateway' to the village.

John mentioned the limited availability of sewer capacity to support increased development within the BOP, as well as his concern about allowing all Commercial district uses in the BOP district. He wondered whether enough

time had passed since last year's changes in the uses allowed in the Commercial and Industrial districts to see if there would be more commercial development in these areas to address the needs Ed Debor had listed. He said it was heard for him to envision large retail stores in the BOP.

Ken Harvey, owner of the 7.8-acre BOP parcel along Bridge Street, noted that commercial, non-industrial uses typically require far less sewage capacity than residential uses.

Sam Guy speaking on behalf of Lamoille Area Recreation Center (aka CREW), stated their desire to be located in the BOP and to see the list of allowable BOP uses expanded as described by others.

LEDC director Karen Lynch stated that she was specifically aware of two businesses that were seeking 5000 square feet of commercial space; no suitable land could be found within the current zoning districts. Bill asked if these businesses were among the uses currently allowed in the BOP. Karen said they were, but the lack of developed infrastructure there forced them to look elsewhere.

Bill explained that the Planning Commission was committed to Town Plan revisions over the remainder of this year. Any zoning bylaw changes that might flow from the new Town Plan would not be considered until this time next year. Ed DeBor, noting that he had asked for consideration of BOP changes more than a year ago, said he didn't want to see the process dragged out. He asked for a commitment to address flexibility in BOP uses. Bill assured him that the Planning Commission would look at that as part of the Town Plan revision process, identifying the planned discussions on the Economic Development and Land Use chapters in June and September as the best opportunity for this topic to be reviewed by all community stakeholders.

Mike Miller gave a brief overview of the Energy chapter in the current Town Plan. Bill identified the need to re-emphasize renewable energy facilities and policies in the plan, noting that these are currently in the plan. Mike said there are not many areas within Morristown that lend themselves to large-scale wind power projects. Andrew said that the plan should encourage and assist individual property owners to develop renewable energy sources for their household needs.

Owing to the length of the meeting, review and approval of the Feb 6 and Feb 13 minutes was deferred to the next meeting, which will be on March 20th. There will be no meeting on March 6th, Town Meeting day.

The meeting adjourned at 9:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Mark Leonard, recorder

Minutes approved on: 3/20/07 AV/BH