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PLANNING COMMISSION
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Minutes of January 17, 2006

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

Guests: Steve Rae

Recorder: Mark Leonard, Zoning Administrator (ZA)

Bill called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM. On a motion by Bill, seconded by John, minutes of the January 3, 2006 meeting were accepted as presented. The ZA reported that the Select Board, at their meeting on January 16, 2006, had adopted the proposed bylaw amendments without any changes to what the Planning Commission (PC) had presented. The new bylaws will be effective on February 6, 2006.

Bill said the purpose of this evening's meeting was to set the PC's agenda for the new year. Steve offered a list of seven issues for consideration. One of these, adoption of the proposed bylaw changes, has been completed. The items suggested are:

1) "create minimum landscape standards for all building permits large and small". The ZA advised that there was no mechanism in the zoning bylaws for applying any such standards for permitted uses but that landscaping standards could be adopted for conditional uses, site plan reviews, and subdivision applications to be reviewed by the DRB. Kelly said the basis for establishing landscaping standards should be to improve the community's appearance. Andrew suggested that Stowe's review standards could be a guideline for developing our own standards. Bill noted that the PC has avoided setting design review standards, instead focusing regulatory provisions on land uses. He said the DRB, who would be charged with applying these standards, should be involved in developing them.

2) "change town-wide 2-acre zoning to more or less acreage as appropriate". Steve said the PC should consider whether a minimum lot size of two acres was appropriate throughout the Rural Residential with Agriculture (RRA) zoning district district. Bill said this could be considered within a broader review of the RRA district, with possible recommendations including splitting the RRA into several smaller districts, each with its own appropriate minimum lot sizes and uses. Part of this discussion could also consider provisions for allowing cluster housing developments and granting housing density bonuses for affordable housing projects.

3) "discuss ways PC can help revitalize the downtown district, e.g., parking, traffic flow, landscaping, etc." The ZA presented a Request for Proposal that Community Coordinator Heidi Krantz is preparing for a grant-funded contract to "review and make recommendations for revisions to existing zoning bylaws, specifically as they pertain to (Morristown's) commercial district and designated downtown district". The recommendations should address design matters such as signage, retail space and location, parking, preservation and use of historic structures and similar aesthetic considerations. The ZA suggested that this review could be the vehicle for engaging this issue.

4) "protect the Route 100 corridor and create an airport protection zone to prevent future conflicts" (between residential and airport users). Bill agreed this should be a topic for discussion, perhaps within the zoning district review envisioned in item #2. The ZA said he would get with Mike Miller at LCPC to determine what work has been done to date on the airport protection issue and what resources are available to proceed on this topic.

5) "research impacts of 'big box' stores on (similarly sized) communities" Several members had raised this issue during last year's bylaw revision and the PC elected to defer discussion on this topic for the next revision. The ZA will gather information on this topic for the PC's review, noting that there seemed to be a number of sources that advocated restrictions on such stores, while there did not appear to be many that took the opposite view.

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6) "create a vision for the town 10, 25, and 50 years from now" Steve said that the PC should look beyond near-term, incremental changes to the zoning bylaws and attempt to outline a vision for the town's long-term future. What and where should the next major change to the character of the town be? Where should a new commercial use area be, if one is needed and desirable? The ZA said that 20 years or so ago, what is today the north end commercial and industrial areas were initially developed. Someone then had the foresight to look ahead and anticipate the community's needs. A similar effort should be undertaken now. The downtown revitalization should be part of that, along with a broader vision for the rest of the town. The ZA said the next mandatory revision of the Town Plan would be due in two years and that this discussion could lay some important groundwork for meaningful revisions to the Plan.

Bill agreed with the proposed list and said he wanted to add one more item: reviewing the development impacts of any sewer service area expansion. He said the joint meeting with the Select Board and Village Trustees in December highlighted concerns he had that the Village Trustees might be having an undue influence on questions of development outside the village boundaries. He said that the draft Town Sewer Service Area (TSSA) agreement outlined at that meeting allowed the Trustees to continue to grant sewer service outside of any TSSA that might be established. He stressed the need for the PC to be involved in identifying any TSSA due to the impact on development arising from providing sewer services in a given area. He said this was an important topic that needed the PC's immediate involvement as the agreement seems to be on track to complete this year. He suggested reviewing the draft agreement at the next meeting and inviting Heidi Krantz, Dave Crawford, and Scott Corse to the next meeting to discuss the way ahead on this issue.

John suggested identifying specific scenic areas to be conserved or otherwise protected from development.

Richard said the PC should work with other community groups (DRB, Conservation Commission, River Arts, etc) as it takes up the issues laid out for this year's work. He encouraged greater interaction between the PC and DRB, suggesting that more PC members step up as DRB alternates when needed to get a better understanding of how the DRB applies the rules and standards developed by the PC.

Steve Rae noted that the "Our Town" Community Forum in 1999 spawned a number of groups to work on specific community improvement projects, some of which have been accomplished. He suggested that another such forum could gather the community input needed to guide the formulation of a town vision for the future. He said that this could be done as part of the 2008 Town Plan revision.

There was consensus on adopting the list of topics for discussion this year. The ZA offered to lay out a proposed schedule for when a given topic will be taken up so that it can be publicized in the community. Bill agreed this was a good idea, with the recommendation that the sewer expansion issue be at the top if the list, with the others to follow. The ZA also suggested that each PC member take responsibility for a topic and be the primary person responsible for gathering the data and information necessary for discussions on that topic.

Bill asked if the PC should take a formal position on the Morristown Centennial Center, the proposal for an expanded library/new town offices project to be voted on at Town Meeting. After discussing the question, the members opted not to take a position either way on the project

On a motion by Bruce, seconded by Kelly, the meeting adjourned at 8:30PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Mark Leonard, recorder

Minutes approved on: 3/7/06