

PLANNING COMMISSION
Draft Minutes
January 7, 2015

Members Present: Sally Miller, Nick Scheu, Sam Segal, Susan Boston, Keri Cole
Members Absent: Paul Highberg, Marilyn Spaulding
Others Present: Tom Hayes, Vincent DiCarlo, Susan Ford, Diedre Savage, Robert Thomas, Don Olson, Jim Mills, Susan Sevchenko, Michael Brands

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 pm.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the November 3, 2014 meetings were approved with a minor change.

III. OLD BUSINESS

A. Shire Motel Zoning Change

Mr. Tom Hayes, attorney representing the owners of the Shire Motel, proposed a Zoning Map change to the PC. Mr. DiCarlo, owner of the motel, was present. Mr. Hayes showed a copy of the Zoning Map with the proposed change.

Ms. Ford, attorney for the purchasers of the motel and B&B, was present to support the proposed zoning change. Her clients, Ms. Savage and Mr. Thomas, were present.

Mr. DiCarlo and his wife own two properties which abut one another on Pleasant Street. The parcel with the motel is located in the Light Commercial zone. The abutting parcel with a bed and breakfast is located in the Residential High Density zone. The owners would like to change the zoning of the B&B to Light Commercial, as the future owners wish to merge the two properties.

The PC responded that while they appreciate the heads-up on the zoning change, they need to review the potential impacts of such a change before reaching a decision.

Mr. Hayes stated an application would be filed in time for the next PC meeting, which is scheduled for February 4, 2015.

B. Design Review Regulations

At the December PC meeting, a proposal to amend the Design Review Regulations was continued to allow input from both the Design and Development Review Boards. The proposal was to strengthen and enhance criteria for shutter placement. This is in response to an Environmental Court decision whereby the judge stated a lack of clear intent on the part of the regulations.

Mr. Olson, former Chair of the Village Design Review Board, asked the PC to support an amendment of the Design Review regulations. A recent court case found certain sections of the regulations to be unclear. Although the court case was about shutters, there are additional items such as fences which are also very important to the streetscape. Instead of a specific amendment directed at shutters, a more encompassing route would be better. A streetscape review may be a means of including the defining elements of the built environment which the Village wishes to retain as part of its character as a community.

In his read of the regulation and court decision, Mr. Olson felt Sections A, F, and G need a little work. A rewrite of Section G would be slightly more complicated as it details the review process.

The Village does not need a historic preservation ordinance. Design should be the key area of review. Context and consistency of the built environment are the important features.

For example, the removal of picket fences along Pleasant Street has had a profound effect on the visual quality of the streetscape. Whereas the picket fences along the Green and Elm Street set a strong sense of streetscape.

One could prioritize various items that are important to the streetscape such as no parking in front yards for example.

Mr. Mills, VDRB Chair, is worried that the shutter case has created a perceived weakening of the Design Review regulations.

Mr. Scheu felt shutters in themselves have very little to do with the streetscape. He wants to know what periods of time are important for shutters. He is still undecided on the issue.

Mr. Mills responded tourists come here because of the "Woodstock look". All buildings are different and most have been renovated in some cases numerous times over their plus 100 year history. Setting an age standard as historic preservation does would be difficult.

Mr. Scheu noted although Woodstock relishes its past, it is still moving forward. Change and creativity are restricted in Woodstock which some feel is an impediment to growth. Being locked into a certain vernacular can be problematic. Young people have a hard time with this.

Mr. Olson stated historic and design get confused. Historic preservation is maintaining historical looks over time based on the year a building was built. Design allows change over time. Perhaps the term historic has been overused.

Mr. Olson prefers a review of the streetscape versus a review of the individual building. Some homes require shutters and some do not, more modern building or unique window configurations. As he sees it, the regulations as written, bend over backwards towards an applicant, perhaps more specificity is required. Certain neighborhoods have a cohesive look which in many cases is due to such things as shutters and fences more than some lesser architectural details.

Mr. Scheu felt the regulations are strict enough.

Chair Miller noted the regulations are written in a way to encourage conversation/negotiation. The

regulations have worked very well up to this point. Perhaps a minor change like a streetscape review section could help to strengthen the element of design versus historic preservation.

Mr. Segal asked if applicants understand the design review process. Although not a fan of shutters, he does realize the importance of the Woodstock look. He also noted enforcement of the resulting decision may be at issue.

Mr. Mills felt the recent court case opened up the fact that the regulations may be perceived as weak and property owners may want to take advantage. He did not feel enforcement of decisions was at issue. Lack of an enhanced regulation may lead to more court action.

Ms. Cole stated the need for a more diverse population. If the regulations are less strict perhaps some properties would be available to younger families.

Mr. Olson supports a minor tweak of the regulations. A major overall would not work with the public. The openness of the regulations needs to be maintained without going the historic preservation route.

Ms. Sevchenko, Design Review Board, notes she leans toward the historic but is constantly reminded that the overall design is the important matter. It is the visual result that comes to the forefront.

The Boards need more teeth to support their decisions.

The Town Planner will resend the court decision to all members. Mr. Olson noted page 3 of the decision is where the judge discusses the need for change within the existing regulations.

Mr. Mills stated aside from shutters and fences, trim details are important.

Mr. Olson mentioned solar panel placement is another issue coming on strong. The specific placement of the panels is what needs to be considered.

The Town Planner will contact Devin Colman, State Office of Historic Preservation and VLCT for assistance in tweaking the Design Review regulations.

During the Board of Trustee discussions on the shutter court case, the Town's Attorney suggested instead of appealing the case to the Supreme Court that money would be better spent on amending the regulations. The Town Planner will speak with the Town Manager on this point.

C. Stone House Act 250

On December 15, the Stone House mitigation sub-committee met with Devin Colman of the State Office of Historic Preservation to discuss a potential mitigation proposal regarding the Act 250 request to demolish the Stone House at the Gerrish East End property.

The following mitigation plan was agreed to which includes an update and enhancement of the Village Historic Survey which had been initially completed in 1973. The survey is out of date and is in dire need of a complete renovation. The first part would be to rewrite the survey. The second part would be an enhancement of the original historic district. The original survey for some reason did not include many Village historic properties. The total cost of the project is estimated to be \$50,000.

Some members voiced their concerns that the Stone House is worth far more than \$50,000. However, the sub-committee agreed the restoration of the property is economically infeasible and that it is time to bring the property back into the revenue producing realm.

The Town Planner read a recent correspondence from Mr. Colman noting the SOHP's intent to meet with consultants to confirm total costs and then to meet with Mr. Burke, the Act 250 applicant, to present the mitigation proposal.

D. Riparian Discussion

The owner of a River Street property would like to amend the riparian regulations to allow more flexibility. Either a reduction of the current 100' buffer requirement or a waiver component to allow exemptions under certain circumstances were proposed by the owner. The scheduled riparian buffer discussion did not take place as the persons requesting said discussion did not attend.

IV. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for **February 4, 2015 at 7:30 pm.**

VI. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:55 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Brands, AICP
Town Planner