

PLANNING COMMISSION
Draft Minutes
Special Meeting
January 31, 2018

Members Present: Sally Miller, Sam Segal, Susan Boston, Jeff Bendis, Sara Stadler
Members Absent: Eric Goldberg, Michael Pacht
Others Present: Joe DiNatale, Michael Brands

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Miller called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Approval of the minutes of the January 3, 2018 meeting were continued.

III. BUSINESS

A. EDC Streetscape - Joe DiNatale

Joe DiNatale, Economic Development Committee, updated the PC on the EDC's plan to revitalize the Village's commercial sector. Mr. DiNatale is working with Meg Seely and Michael Malik on this project.

The primary intent is to fill store front by eliminating the vacancies. A few months ago there were eight vacancies under three different landlords. The basic problem is that the rents are too high and the landlords refuse to lower them. The EDC has found tenants but none have been willing to pay the high rents.

The subcommittee is advertising for a professional architect to look into the issue. Initial thoughts were more along the beautification of the streetscape such as adding trash barrels, flower boxes, benches, etc. However, the architect would be given free rein to come up to viable solutions.

The area to be covered would be from St. James west to the Sunoco station along Route 4 and the commercial section of Elm Street.

The EDC feels a vibrant downtown commercial district will help maintain a steady growth of tourism which in turn will ultimately create more full time residents.

The PC asked how much money is available?

Mr. DiNatale stated the annual revenue from the EDC's 1% budget garnered from the State's local rooms and meals tax is +/- \$240,000. The EDC has \$150,000 on hand in a bank account.

Mr. DiNatale emphasized "revitalize" is the key word, not "beautification". The intent is to make the town more attractive and more welcoming which in turn will draw more business interest, not to make the town prettier.

The EDC hopes to hold a public hearing with local businesses and the interested public to review the plan once formulated.

The EDC would like to share any future costs with private and public sources: Selectboard and Trustees. This engages the whole community in the process and not just the EDC.

Mr. Bendis suggested subsidizing rents as a means of filling the vacant spots, may be a better use of the funds.

Mr. DiNatale stated the EDC vetoed the concept of subsidized rents.

Chair Miller stated the walk Woodstock groups would like more presence. A few years ago trail maps were made and distributed. In more touristic towns, there are numerous kiosks and other tourist aids - maps, brochures, small signs. This aspect of Woodstock is under promoted as is the National Park, another great asset.

Mr. DiNatale supported the more walkable community model as being attractive to tourists and residents alike.

Ms. Stadler asked what products, goods or services are needed in Woodstock. Creating a list of such may help fill the store fronts.

Mr. DiNatale, stated the EDC did not wish to approach the problem in this manner.

The Town Planner noted that one of the more prominent vacant spots, 20 Central Street just received a permit to open an 83 seat restaurant.

B. Woodstock Housing Study

Sustainable Woodstock has drafted a Request for Proposal to conduct a housing study for the Town & Village of Woodstock. The draft was emailed to members prior to the meeting.

The Town Planner asked if \$15,000 was sufficient to do all the work requested in the draft. He agreed the study is needed. The Kantz study is more than ten years old.

Chair Miller stated she spoke with a consultant who felt the work could be completed for the requested amount. The money would come from the EDC 1% funds, should they approve the expenditure.

Mr. Bendis in earlier comments, felt the main question should be reversed to “why do people move to Woodstock?”, not “why don’t they move to Woodstock?”

The Town Planner stated that the main problem is affordability. Homes and rents are out of reach for the average citizen. For the past ten to fifteen years, all newly hired department heads for the Town of Woodstock live outside of Woodstock. People who work in Woodstock have to drive further and further from home to work, due to the high housing costs associated with Woodstock. New employees rarely live in Woodstock.

C. Village Zoning Rewrite

The PC reviewed the Town Planner’s list of potential changes to the Village Zoning Regulations.

Design Review changes were reviewed first. After a discussion of color, Mr. Bendis asked for additional time to review the inclusion of color in the Design Review regulations. In September the PC agreed not to include color, but after a brick sided home was painted in October the issue resurfaced.

Landscaping in the Design Review district was discussed. Landscaping is important especially as it defines a streetscape, but is also very important to screen elements one wishes to hide such as vents or exposed concrete. The Board would not review an application for just landscaping, but rather as part of a home renovation, wall or fence construction. The same holds true for driveway and sidewalk materials. They would be reviewed as part of a building application.

The Design Review Board asked to review street furniture, but not private outdoor furniture. Last year a number of rustic wooden picnic tables were placed around the Village. The Board felt they should have been reviewed before placement to assure compatibility with the site selected.

Jack Anderson, local Historic Preservationist and former director of the Woodstock Historical Society asked that buildings be historically catalogued before they are removed as part of a review regarding demolition. The PC felt some structures warrant this more than others. Discussion followed regarding where to draw the line.

The PC reviewed the issue of parking. A 10' setback from property line was suggested for all parking spaces. A waiver could be granted via a Conditional Use Review for special circumstances as there are numerous small narrow lots that do not have a 10' setback available. The PC agreed this should not be used for regular residential applications, but should be part of multi-family housing review. Commercial/industrial uses already have a 10' setback requirement from residential uses or districts.

The PC agreed that the following items should be included as proposed in the zoning rewrite:

1. Off-street parking areas shall be drained so as to dispose of all surface water accumulated in the parking area in such a manner as to preclude drainage of water onto adjacent properties or toward buildings.

2. All lighting used to illuminate any off-street parking areas shall be installed as to be confined within and directed onto the parking area only.

The PC discussed the issue of electric chargers and agreed that they should be added to the list of items requiring a review by the Design Review, as some are more aesthetic than others. A requirement to add chargers per X number of parking spaces was declined.

The PC agreed that public sidewalks for commercial/industrial developments should be required when a new application takes place.

The PC noted that asphalt driveways standards should be discussed in the proposed stormwater section.

The Town's stormwater regulations will be rewritten to fit the needs of the Village.

Regulating the riparian buffer areas in the Village is difficult due to grandfathered uses and few full existing natural buffers. All waterways in the Village carry a 100' riparian zone measured from top of the bank. One relief would be to back off to a 50' riparian zone. A second measure would be to adopt standards from the State's River Corridor Model Regulation which allows grandfathered developed areas a certain leniency to develop no closer to the waterway or in the "shadow" (downstream) from existing development. The Town Planner will rework the model language to fit the Village's need.

An additional issue is the minor impacts presented by such items as fire pits, benches, small structures in a riparian zone. The current regulations allow up to 5% of the buffer area to be used for trails. Fire pits have been allowed under those circumstances. This section will take more thought to allow these types of uses.

Due to lack of time, the PC stopped their discussion at signs.

D. Town Plan Energy Chapter Revision

Due to lack of time the item was not discussed.

V. OPEN DISCUSSION - None

VI. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for February 7, 2018.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Brands, AICP
Town/Village Planner