

WOODSTOCK PLANNING COMMISSION

Wednesday, March 3, 2021

7:30PM

ZOOM MEETING

MEETING MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT: Sally Miller, Ben Jervey, Susan Boston, Susan Silberberg, Sara Stadler, Mary Margaret Sloan

MEMBERS ABSENT: Sam Segal

OTHERS PRESENT: Neal Leitner, Patrick Fultz

I. Call To Order: 7:30 PM

II. Approve Minutes

February 3, 2021 minutes approved.

III. Old Business

A. Accessory on Farm Business (AOFB)/ Act 143 update

Neal Leitner provided information from the Town Development Review board meeting regarding AOFB on Pomfret Road and acknowledged that after receiving the metrics the decision was put on recess to get more information and clarify conflicting information. Neal explained there were some discrepancies in the number of meals per night from the application vs expected. Neal Leitner noted that all neighbors are informed, and all meetings and emails have been shared publicly for full transparency. Leitner also stated that the neighbors are understanding now that this can be conditioned to an accessory on farm business, and that you can place enough conditions to make it an accessory, and having a one year check in, which could be beneficial to any AOFB. Leitner also said that this specific applicant does need to apply for the ACT 250 permit still, and was not sure if he was waiting to see what conditions the town will apply. Sally Miller said if any adjustments need to be made to zoning regulations to let the board know.

Sara Stadler asked how many people the restaurant expects to have per night, and Neal Leitner explained this is where the discrepancy is, the operator said about 40 tops per night during peak production, and the applicant applied for 70 meals a night 5 nights a week. A site visit happened on the farm which was helpful to get a sense of size and scale. Leitner said the point of contention is the bar becoming a hotspot, which needs to be addressed. Sally Miller asked if a liquor license has been applied for, Leitner replied that it has been applied for and granted with conditions until the rest of the permits are in place.

B. Town Plan – Amendments to Education Chapter updates

Susan Boston took edits from Sam Segal and made some small edits to his edits as well to the Education Chapter. Susan Boston stated there was one edit made by Segal that did not

make sense to her, it is in the ACT 60, at the end of the first paragraph under ACT 60 he added a sentence. Susan Boston thinks that sentence can be left out.

Susan Boston noted that this was a good learning experience for rewriting a chapter, and that getting opinions from more people is beneficial to the writing process. Susan Boston then stated she will accept all Segal's edits, besides the ACT 60, and asked what the next step is. Sally Miller said that the commission will vote on the changes, and then it will go to a public hearing.

Sara Stadler moved that the Education Chapter be adopted as written and sent to public hearing. Susan Boston seconded the motion.

Motion Passed 6-0

Discussion

Susan Silberberg then asked who owns the town plan. Sally Miller explained it is a municipal document that the Planning Commission writes and the plan itself belongs to the town. Susan Silberberg then asked who is responsible for enforcing it, and its implementation. Sally Miller said that the town plan rests with the Planning Commission, but it is a municipal plan, and that the Planning Commission never has time to do anything with it. Miller stated the Planning Commission uses it to write ordinances. Sally Miller then explained the differences between a town plan and a master plan, and agrees that the town plan does not have much for implantation. Susan Silberberg said that the Education Chapter took a lot of effort to rewrite, and to not know how it will be implemented can be dispiriting. Sally Miller brought up another chapter that the Conservation Commission helped rewrite and implement, and noted it is important to have people who are engaged, because it's required to have a town plan to get different funding for the community. Neal Leitner said that regarding the Education Chapter, the Select Board members were concerned about parts of this chapter as well, regarding the substance abuse part for example, how can the town implement the reduction of substance abuse in the school. Leitner also said that different boards are aware of the chapters relevant to them and try to use it when accepting applications and other requests. Mary Margaret Sloan suggested that in two years members from the school come and revisit the Education Chapter so that the commission can get input for future edits. Sally Miller noted that previously the town plan was rewritten all at the same time, but over the last few years specific chapters have needed edits so they have been done piece by piece. Susan Boston noted that for example the Energy Chapter needed to be addressed right away when it was rewritten. Sally Miller noted that the whole town plan does need to be rewritten, and asked Neal Leitner if there was a time frame certain things needed to be done by. Neal said the current plan is under 10 years old currently, but there is not a statute of limitations for it. Sally Miller suggested the commission puts time aside to discuss the Town Plan. Ben Jervey suggested first Wednesday would be for Agenda items and then the commission can add special meetings to discuss the plan further.

Sally Miller addressed community member Patrick Fultz who is sitting in on the meeting and asked if he had any specific business he needed to address, he stated he has just enjoyed

sitting in on town meetings and learning about what is going on. Fultz noted he sat in on the Highway meeting, and gave some information on the progress, however no bids have been accepted as of yet so there was not much specific information to provide, however lodging people and businesspeople are curious as to a timeframe so they can prepare for business while the roads are being worked on. Fultz also made a suggestion regarding the town plan and creating committees from the community to help with the writing of the plan.

IV. New Business

A. Discussion of Village Zoning Regulations: Historic District; Design Review; Designated Downtown designation; Residential Building Energy Standards; Fences in Village Design Review District.

Neal Leitner gave information from his meeting with Devin Coleman and provided the committee with a map of the proposed historic district, and his discussion about expanding the historic district, and what that brings for the town in terms of grant or funding opportunities. Leitner stated he was not sure if it makes sense to match the Design Review with the Historic District, but if it can bring in funding opportunities to the town it would be beneficial for some programs that require a Historic District. Leitner explained the two maps, stating the red is the old map, and the green is the new map, which was designed by Devon Coleman based on a historic survey from 2019. Sally Miller commented that the original Historic District was cut down Route 4 on Pleasant Street, and the buildings that are across the street on the southside of Pleasant Street are just as historic as those on the northside and there was a question as to why that was done. Sally Miller and Susan Boston noted that it looks like every property was outlined. Susan Silberberg asked how does the Historic District affect cost of redevelopment, ability to demo, or infill, because she looked at the 2016 comprehensive plan for the town and the future land use plan looks like it shows the highest density residential is proposed in some areas near Mt. Peg, which would now be in the new historic district, and how the expansion of the district can affect some of the other goals the town has for affordable housing or higher density. Sally Miller said that the Historic District is only really a classification, and you can still take a building down in the Historic District, you just have to document it. Susan Silberberg then asked if there was criteria on colors, windows, materials for rebuilding in the district, and Neal Leitner noted that would be Design Review. Susan Boston then asked who decides what properties are in the Design Review area, Sally Miller said that was decided when the Design Review District was made, and Miller believes this has not been changed besides adding the East Design Review District. Susan Boston then asked what the benefit is of expanding the Historic District, Neal Leitner replied that he hopes it will bring in additional funding. Susan Silberberg asked if it makes the town eligible for historic tax credits. Neal Leitner said he was not sure, but will look into if it can open up funding for development by Mt. Peg. Sally Miller noted that the new map also includes undeveloped areas of the larger parcels, and said that the open spaces, and spacing of the houses gives the historic feel to the area, and maybe it is to protect the area. Miller then said she would like to know that Devon Coleman's criteria was for putting the line, and is there a way to simplify it in a way. Susan Silberberg brought up that there was also discussion to reduce some of the

Historic District, to which Susan Boston replied she does live in a part of the Historic District that does not have anything historic there. Neal Leitner noted that College Hill did cause a delay for the map, because it was originally added to the new map and then removed, he also said he would ask what the intent of the empty lots is. Susan Boston and Sally Miller then discussed the inclusion of Faulkner Park, regarding the line on the map and town ownership, and the Faulkner Trust property line. Sally Miller then asked for more information on how the boundaries are determined, and what it means in terms of the town adopting this, and what are the advantages as well, Neal Leitner said he will follow up on that as well.

There was also discussion on some of the parcels included, such as one on South St and some extended down to Maple St, while some may not be historic, they have historic significance. Sara Stadler asked how emotional the tie to Historic District is, as where she used to live because there were tax breaks, and other benefits to having a home in the district, Neal replied that he did not get that sense for the Historic District, but it may be more relevant for people in the Design Review District. Downtown designation was brought up, and Sally Miller noted that there was already Village designation that provided benefits such as tax credits. Neal said that Downtown Designation would add a transportation fund but that is currently depleted, and there is a lot of work to set it up, and he also spoke with members of the board in Bradford regarding Downtown Designation, and it does require someone working 15-20 hours weekly. Susan Boston then asked about the certified local government program, Neal said he has been pursuing this further and the Historic District is essential for this, and having a Historic Preservation Board, however Design Review can cover that, he also explained the certified local government requires more legwork up front but once you are in, you are set. Sally Miller asked if there were other local communities in Vermont with local government, Neal said there were others, one being Shelburne which he contacted, and said they were very positive about it.

Sally Miller then asked if there was any feedback from Design Review, to which Neal Leitner replied that he was seeing that there is not a push to expand it. Miller then said the Planning Commission can go back and look at it and see if there is any potential conflict regarding Susan Silberberg's earlier comments regarding affordable housing.

Sally Miller then asked about residential building energy standards, Neal stated he is still waiting on a final report from Jeff Martin the interregional energy coordinator. Neal said that Section 813F of the zoning regulations is outdated, and currently the 21VSA 266 which is not in existence anymore so Jeff Martin is updating this new wording that sites the current codes, state statues, and will bring it into the current regulations, it is not adding any new regulation, just updating the current regulation, and Jeff Martin currently has sent the draft out for review before finalizing. Neal noted this can be easily adopted once finalized.

Neal Leitner then brought up fences in the village, and the concept is currently 4 ft maximum for front yards, and 6 ft maximum for backyards and what if the commission added one layer, requiring putting a fence up to 6 ft in a backyard in the village would need a conditional use permit, because as more fences go up it will affect the character of the neighborhood. Sally Miller asked what the best way to get this into the zoning regulations,

and if these changes can be added in as a group instead of piece by piece, and if there are zoning map changes that need to be made, and if the appropriate zoning is set up for all of the districts, and if the commission wants to wait until revising the zoning maps until there is a further discussion. Sally Miller then asked Neal Leitner if he thinks the town should have someone come out to designate the neighborhoods. Susan Silberberg also noted that determining the boundaries of the neighborhoods can take some time, but how much of the work can possibly be done by an intern with information from the assessor's office, using a setup similar to how Montpeiler used. Sally Miller then said that currently she would start with the Village because it is more manageable, and brought up Faulkner Park, and reactions of neighbors, and that she believes people would be interested in the discussion. Sara Stadler then asked Neal Leitner if there were other ways to approach this. Patrick Fultz then said the EDC has been looking into ways to increase housing by looking at allowing people to create extra apartments in larger buildings, and over the businesses in town to create more apartments from existing structures. Sally Miller said that the commission has talked about accessory dwelling units, and there are provisions in the zoning at some level that can be revisited.

Sally Miller then asked about affordable housing on the agenda, and if there was anything specific to be discussed. Neal Leitner said it was just to discuss in general to follow up from previous discussions. Leitner stated Mike Miller sent material to discuss. Sally Miller said she would like a bigger study and wondered if the EDC can roll into their housing study, and to understand what it would take to do a neighborhood survey, and look at what the level of conformance is, and what the neighborhoods really look like in terms of the number of units per building. Miller then brought up that Mike Miller did bring up a parking issue, which she believes is going to be the biggest issue, and making sure the community is not overwhelmed with parking. Neal Leitner said it would be good to add some parking wordage to the regulation. Sally Miller then said that adding apartments above some downtown businesses could cause issues because not all buildings have parking, because there are regulations to be off the street during parts of the year.

Sara Stadler moved to adjourn the meeting. Susan Boston seconded the motion.

Motion passed 6-0.

Meeting adjourned at 8:50 PM

Next meeting scheduled for Wednesday April 7th, 2021.