

Town of Amherst Planning Board Zoning Subcommittee
Minutes of Wednesday, February 15, 2017

Members present: Greg Stutsman, Maria Chao, Rob Crowner
Staff present: Chris Brestrup, Geoff Kravitz
Others present: Mollye Lockwood, Maurianne Adams, Sarah LaCour

Mr. Stutsman called the meeting to order at 5:03pm in the 1st floor meeting room at Amherst Town Hall.

1. Announcements and minutes.

The committee approved the minutes of the February 1, 2017 meeting by consensus.

2. Zoning articles in progress.

a. Table 3 footnotes: Two amendments to reduce the number of footnotes by shifting language to Section 6.1 have been prepared. One is a grab bag concerning religious uses and the standards for a building lot, while the other would affect three footnotes dealing with side and rear setbacks. Neither is expected to be controversial, though the latter could be a little confusing. The committee agreed to recommend to the Planning Board that both be placed on the Spring Town Meeting warrant.

b. Non-substantive corrections: This amendment has been ready since last fall, but wasn't brought forward due to the number of other zoning articles on the Fall Town Meeting warrant. With fewer articles in progress this cycle, the committee agreed to recommend that it be placed on the warrant.

c. Apartment bedroom mix: After making some minor edits to improve the precision of the language, the committee agreed to recommend that this article be placed on the warrant. However, if it becomes apparent that Valley CDC's plans have changed before Town Meeting, the committee would be inclined to withdraw the article.

3. Parking amendments.

The upcoming joint meeting of the Planning Board and Downtown Parking Working Group is intended in part to decide whether there is an appropriate zoning response to the concerns raised at the last Town Meeting during the debate about rezoning B-L districts abutting the downtown. A parking requirement could be imposed on residential use at some level. Fees-in-lieu could be accepted to fulfill the requirement, and could be earmarked for parking improvements, for example. A Parking Benefit District, suggested as a possible new tool, is likely similar to Amherst's existing Parking Enterprise Fund.

4. Petition article.

The language of the petition article that has been filed and referred to the Planning Board is unclear in two aspects: (1) It requests that parcel 5A-1 be rezoned "from COM. . ." but parts of 5A-1 are actually zoned RN and FPC in addition to the parts zoned COM, so it is not clear whether those parts are intended to be included in the rezoning. (2) The concluding clause of the article, "to take any action related thereto", may be too vague.

5. Planning forums.

The committee acknowledged that work on the town center planning forum(s) will have to be undertaken

by the Planning Board itself or Planning Department staff if Pioneer Valley Planning Commission declines to accept the Planning Board's request for support. It will be important to define the parameters of what we want to learn from forum attendees. Expected outcomes from this process could include changes to the zoning map, changes to the text of the zoning bylaw, or revisions or clarifications of the Town's master plan.

The committee and members of the public discussed some of the questions or propositions that might be explored at a forum, including: Is there a need for more housing, or should that be taken as a given? Can the existing zoning district absorb all of the needed or desired densification, or should the area be expanded? What are the reasons or conditions present that make expansion seem needed? Why isn't densification happening the way people want it to under existing conditions?

The committee agreed to recommend that the Planning Board schedule the first forum for mid-April (before Town Meeting starts), and that prior to that – probably by its April 5 meeting – goals be identified and the format be established. It would be useful to be able to present some metrics – comparisons of our town center with other towns' centers.

6. Topics not reasonably anticipated prior to the meeting.

7. Next meetings.

Next meeting: March 1, 2017.

8. Adjournment.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:04pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Rob Crowner