

PLANNING BOARD

DATE: November 13, 2014
TIME: 7:00 P.M.
PLACE: Housatonic Community Center
FOR: Regular Meeting
PRESENT: Jonathan Hankin, Chairman; Suzanne Fowle; Jack Musgrove; Malcolm Fick
Chris Rembold, Town Planner

Mr. Hankin called the meeting to order at 7:00 P.M.

FORM A'S:

Mark Reynolds from Kelly, Granger, Parsons and Associates was present with a Form A application on behalf of Abby Schroeder for a parcel of land located on the north side of Stony Brook Road. Parcel A contains 0.146 acres of land. It is to be conveyed to an abutter and not to be considered a separate building lot.

Mr. Musgrove made a motion to approve the plan, Mr. Fick seconded, all in favor.

Mr. Reynolds presented a Form A application on behalf of Robert and Jane Holcomb for a parcel of land located on the south side of Cottage Street. Parcel A contains 0.8 acres of land and not to be considered a separate building lot.

Mr. Musgrove made a motion to approve the plan, Ms. Fowle seconded, all in favor.

MINUTES: SEPTEMBER 11, 2014 & OCTOBER 23, 2014

Ms. Fowle made a motion to approve the minutes from the regular meeting of September 11, 2014 as amended, Mr. Musgrove seconded, all in favor.

Ms. Fowle made a motion to approve the minutes of October 23, 2014 as amended, Mr. Musgrove seconded, all in favor.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION: 100 BRIDGE STREET

Timothy Geller, Executive Director of the CDC and Michael Charles, from Benchmark Development, were present to discuss the plans for the site at 100 Bridge Street.

Mr. Geller said he wanted to let the Planning Board know where the project is and where it is headed. The proposal for the property is for a commercial building at the front of the property. The Berkshire Coop Market will use most of the first floor of the building, with the balance being retail space. There will be office space for the Co-op and others on the second floor. There will be seven other residential buildings on the property with a mix of affordable and market rate units. Some of the buildings will be four stories with four housing units per floor. There will be variations in the size of the units. They will be 1-3 bedroom units about 900 square feet on average.

Mr. Hankin asked if the project would be a 40B.

Mr. Geller said yes. He said a 40B project can override local zoning when 25% of the housing is affordable. The project proposes to have 45 affordable housing units and 30 housing units at market rate.

Mr. Fick said the position of the commercial building could be toward the street.

Mr. Charles said the goal is to activate the site around the building.

Mr. Hankin asked about deliveries by trailer trucks.

Mr. Charles said the entrance to the site for both cars and trucks would be from Bentley Avenue. The loading dock would be at the southeast corner of the Co-op building. He said there will be an open green space in the center as between the buildings and the river.

Mr. Musgrove asked if there would be a playground.

Mr. Charles said he wasn't anticipating a playground.

Mr. Hankin asked about the bioremediation process.

Mr. Geller said he does not know how the bioremediation is working. The site will be tested soon or possibly wait until spring. He said the intent is to break ground next summer. If the bioremediation works the dirt could be clean. If it partially works then part of the site may need to be capped.

Mr. Hankin asked if there are floodplain issues.

Mr. Geller said yes.

Mr. Charles said all the buildings are out of the floodplain. The goal is to balance the site.

Mr. Geller said the plan is not to exceed the footprints which previously existed on the site. There will be extensive water management on the site.

Mr. Musgrove asked if there any elevations.

Mr. Geller said there will be a contemporary mill look. The goal is for the building to look like mill buildings that were renovated. The commercial building will have more of a downtown feel.

Mr. Hankin remarked that this proposal is better than the last he had seen. He said he hoped that the central green area will be very much an active space. He suggested that programming the space might be considered.

Mr. Charles said there is not dedicated parking on the site. There will be 70+ parking spaces provided.

Mr. Geller said relief from parking requirements will be applied for.

Mr. Musgrove said it is good to plan for spaces to have a double use; residential in the evening and commercial during the day.

Mr. Geller said he would like to be on the next agenda. He said the funding round from the state will be in February or March. We would like to be in the queue. We need to have permits in place to be able to be considered for the funding.

Mr. Rembold said the ZBA is the granting authority for the 40B. The permit process will override local zoning but state laws will apply.

Ms. Fowle asked if the permit will come before the Planning Board.

Mr. Rembold said the Board will be advisory to the ZBA.

Mr. Hankin said there could be issues with the Conservation Commission because of the outer riparian zone.

Mr. Charles said we haven't gone there yet. He said the plan is to meet the requirements. Previously the entire inner riparian zone was disturbed.

Mr. Hankin asked if they had reached out to the neighborhood.

Mr. Geller said yes. He said there will be a meeting next week at the library. We are encouraging people in the neighborhood to attend.

Mr. Hankin said there will be parallel parking on Bentley Ave. He asked if it is wide enough to accommodate parking.

Mr. Geller said yes. It will be widened as required to make it work.

Mr. Geller and Mr. Charles thanked the Board for their time. They will attend the next meeting on December 11.

SMART GROWTH ZONING & HOUSING PRODUCTION: BRPC

Patricia Mullens, Senior Planner at BRPC and Jacquelyn Pacejo from BRPC were present to discuss SMART Growth Zoning and the Housing Production Plan. Handouts for the discussion were given to the Board members.

Ms. Mullens said BRPC is working with the Town on the Housing Production Plan. A comprehensive housing needs assessment was done as a first part of the plan. The assessment shows that 34% of homeowners in Great Barrington are cost burdened. It also shows that 55% of renters are cost burdened. The plan goes through affordable housing goals and the implementation of strategies.

Ms. Mullens said the goal is for every community to have 10% of their housing affordable. Great Barrington has 7%+ affordable housing. The Bridge Street project will help to bring that percentage closer to the goal. Any community with less than 10% affordable housing is vulnerable to an unfriendly 40B. The Comprehensive Production Plan gives a community protection against an unfriendly 40B. This will be a year long process with more meetings.

Mr. Fick said it is early in the process. He asked who approves the goals.

Ms. Mullens said the Planning Board and the Board of Selectmen will approve the goals.

Mr. Hankin asked if the plan will be site specific.

Ms. Mullens said it can be but it doesn't have to be.

Mr. Hankin asked if the aging population is taken into consideration.

Ms. Mullens said yes. She said Berkshire County is aging faster than other areas.

A member of the audience, Mr. Cohen, asked if Veteran housing was considered as it is becoming an issue.

Ms. Mullens said yes it is also considered.

Mr. Cohen said there are many issues around Veteran housing. Some towns won't allow it. There is money available right now for Veteran housing.

Ms. Mullens said it is important to consider and provide as it demonstrates that a community is working to provide affordable housing.

Mr. Hankin said the Town just received some grant money for housing costs.

Ms. Mullens said yes that money will go toward housing renovations.

Mr. Rembold said the Town has been doing a lot of work to identify housing needs and to address them. The Community Preservation Act and the Community Block Grant are a couple of ways to demonstrate that we are working toward meeting the housing goals. He said the more we do the more competitive we are.

Mr. Mullens said we need to come up with strategies to assist with the goals through 40R.

Ms. Pacejo discussed the Smart Growth Overlay District. She went through the handout.

Mr. Hankin asked how long 40R has been around.

Ms. Pacejo said about 10 years.

Ms. Mullens said there are fewer communities in the western part of the state that have applied 40R. A transportation hub is a requirement.

Mr. Hankin asked if the mill buildings could qualify for the density requirement.

Ms. Mullens said they could.

Mr. Rembold said under utilized site with infrastructure can qualify.

Mr. Fick asked if the Town was going to be asked to consider the plan at the Town Meeting in May.

Mr. Rembold said 40R is a bylaw. There is work that needs to be done.

Mr. Fick said it doesn't seem possible to have it ready by May.

Mr. Rembold said 40R can be by-right with design guidelines.

Mr. Hankin asked if the mill buildings would be more attractive to a developer with a 40R overlay district.

Mr. Cohen said 9% tax credits and 4% qualifying costs of development are important considerations for developers. The mills could qualify for a huge tax credit for historic restoration.

Mr. Hankin asked if 40R is in place, is there an increased ability to get incentives.

Mr. Cohen said yes it is very helpful.

Mr. Hankin asked if there are any unintended consequences.

Mr. Cohen said no at the end of the day you have the tool in place.

Ms. Mullens said BRPC will explore ideas to see what could work and return with more information. She said we will most likely return in January with more information.

HOUSATONIC ZONING:

Mr. Rembold said he has nothing new. He said the current proposal is to take the existing B-1 zone and modify the Table of Use. He said this discussion will be on the next meeting agenda.

TOWN PLANNER'S REPORT:

Mr. Rembold reminded Mr. Hankin that the FY16 Budget needs to be prepared and submitted by the end of December.

He reminded the Board members to do their Ethics Training and get the certificate and receipt to the Town Clerk as soon as possible, the paperwork is due by the end of December.

OTHER ISSUES AND CONCERNS/COMMITTEE UPDATES:

Ms. Fowle said December 1 is the deadline for the CPA applications. Currently there are 21 or 22 applicants.

Mr. Musgrove asked if a summary of the applicants could be circulated to the Board members.

Mr. Rembold said he would circulate.

Mr. Cohen said he has a concern over the visual impact of solar arrays. He said solar panels have been installed across from his property on Hurlburt Road. He asked the Board to consider requiring screening of the arrays. He said many people come to this area because of the natural beauty. The solar arrays have an impact on the natural beauty of this area. He asked if the Board could write a regulation to require screening as part of the building permit process. He said he is suggesting screening that would not impair the function of the array rather something to keep the beauty of the Town.

Mr. Hankin said when he sees solar panels he doesn't think they are ugly, rather that it makes the Town appear to be progressive.

Mr. Fick said he is not sure we can regulate.

Mr. Cohen asked for screening just from the street.

Mr. Fick said there are setback requirements.

Mr. Cohen said the ground mounted panel could have vegetation around and between them.

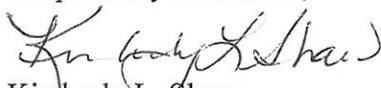
Mr. Musgrove asked Mr. Rembold to look into it.

ASSOCIATE MEMBER;

Jeremy Higa was present. He has expressed interest in the Associate Member position. The Board welcomed him and encouraged him to send a letter to the Selectmen.

Having concluded their business, Mr. Hankin adjourned the meeting without objection at 9:38 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,


Kimberly L. Shaw
Planning Board Secretary