

PLANNING BOARD

DATE: August 27, 2015
TIME: 7:00 P.M.
PLACE: Large Meeting Room
FOR: Regular Meeting
PRESENT: Jonathan Hankin, Chairman; Suzanne Fowle; Brandee Nelson; Malcolm Fick
Jack Musgrove participated via phone
Jeremy Higa, Associate Member
Chris Rembold, Town Planner

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

FORM A'S:

Mike Parsons from Kelly, Granger, Parsons and Associates was present with a Form A application on behalf of Robert and Jane Holcomb for two lots located on the south side of Cottage Street. Parcel A contains 0.19 acres of land. Parcel B contains 0.13 acres of land and is not to be considered a separate building lot.

Ms. Nelson made a motion to approve the application, Ms. Fowle seconded, all in favor.

MINUTES: AUGUST 13, 2015

Ms. Fowle made a motion to approve the minutes of August 13, 2015 as amended, Ms. Nelson seconded, all in favor.

HOLIDAY INN EXPRESS RECOMMENDATION TO THE ZBA:

Mr. Musgrove called in at 7:08 P.M. There was a quorum in the room.

Mr. Hankin said after the last meeting he drafted a letter to the ZBA detailing the Planning Board's discussion of the Holiday Inn Express special permit request to add 20 rooms to their existing hotel. The Board was not able to agree on a recommendation but agreed to send a letter outlining the discussion points.

Ms. Fowle said there were a couple of points made at the last meeting that she would like to see in the letter. One point is that adding a third story would send the message that town does not work hard to preserve its character. Also, allowing the addition would be inconsistent with the work done to allow for more rooms in historic structures.

Mr. Hankin said he is not sure how historic structure discussion is germane to this application.

Ms. Fowle said the Board spent a great deal of time thoughtfully going through the process to allow for more rooms in historic structures. The Town voted for the recommendation. She said she didn't see how it wouldn't be germane.

There was discussion specific to a paragraph in the draft letter. Mr. Fick said he would like a sentence added regarding his comment that people will travel to Lenox or Pittsfield to stay in chain hotels if there are not rooms in a chain hotel available in Great Barrington.

Ms. Nelson asked if there was any discussion about what would happen if the expansion is not permitted.

Mr. Rembold said the owner has been threatened that he may lose the brand if he does not expand the hotel.

Ms. Nelson said she would not see how the building would be repurposed. She said she would hate to see the hotel close.

The Board allowed a comment from Gaetan LaChance who owns a bed and breakfast in Great Barrington. He commented that 45 room limit that is in place seems reasonable. He said he is surprised that this application is being considered. He said it is very rare for there to be 100% occupancy. He said this expansion would impact smaller businesses.

Mr. Rembold cautioned the Board not to rehash the merits of the proposal because the applicant is not present.

There was further discussion of the draft letter. It was suggested that not all members were in agreement on the points of discussion which resulted in a lack of agreement. It was noted that if some points were included that not all agreed with that the other side of that discussion should also be included. It was agreed that the draft was neutral on most points but all the points needed to be made in a neutral manner.

Mr. Hankin said he received a letter from Nick Arienti the attorney for the applicant. He said he did not intend for there to be further debate but felt the letter should be noted and that Mr. Arienti asked that the economic benefits be restated.

The Board concluded their discussion of the draft. Mr. Fick said he would be comfortable with Mr. Hankin incorporating this discussion in a final letter to be sent to the ZBA. The Board agreed.

PROPOSED ZONING BYLAW AMENDMENTS:

There was a brief discussion of the Tracy & Hoddy special permit discussed at the last meeting that was required because the structure was within 300 feet of the river. The application went through the Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Selectboard and the ZBA. The language for this bylaw was drafted in the 1980's. The State passed the Rivers Protection Act in 1996 which should be adequate. This zoning bylaw is onerous and redundant.

Ms. Nelson asked if there is a strategy for the annual town Meeting.

Mr. Hankin said a large part of what needs to be amended is housekeeping.

Mr. Hankin asked Ms. Nelson if the lighting bylaw she sent around was an actual bylaw.

Ms. Nelson said yes. It can be adopted in its entirety or whatever meets the Town's needs.

Mr. LaChance asked if there is a dark sky bylaw. He said the new decorative lights at the crosswalks on Main Street are not dark sky friendly.

Mr. Hankin said the Board refers to and imposes a dark sky standard but the Town does not have a bylaw to address dark skies.

It was agreed that most of the amendments proposed for consideration could be done at the next town meeting. There are a couple of proposed amendments that might need more work but there can be further discussion.

Mr. Musgrove said he needed to disconnect from the meeting. His call was ended at 7:58 P.M.

TOWN PLANNER'S REPORT:

Mr. Rembold said the Board will have a special permit at the next meeting for a tea house at 2 Elm Street. Parking waivers will also be required. He asked if the Board felt it necessary to conduct a site visit.

The Board did not feel a site visit was necessary.

Mr. Rembold said the Town had received a Block Grant for \$842,000. Main Street Housatonic will benefit from most of the money. A portion of the money will be used for housing rehabs.

Mr. Rembold said \$2.1 million in grant money will be used to rehabilitate Bridge Street from Main Street to the bridge and from the bridge to Bentley Avenue. The bridge itself will be worked on next year by Mass DOT.

Mr. Rembold said the Attorney General had approved the Wetlands bylaw approved at the Annual Town Meeting.

Mr. Rembold said the Town has hired Kyle Zick to guide the planning process for Lake Mansfield. Mr. Zick will meet with the Lake Mansfield Task Force on September 14 to discuss the process and plan for public meetings.

OTHER CONCERNS & BOARD/COMMITTEE UPDATES:

Ms. Nelson said the Energy Committee will be disbanding. They have completed what they were charged to do. It has become increasingly difficult to get enough members for a quorum.

The Community Preservation Act committee has three applications, so far, moving into the second step of the process. Deadline for completing the first step is September 1.

CITIZEN SPEAK TIME:

No one spoke.

Having concluded their business, Mr. Hankin adjourned the meeting without objection at 8:12 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,



Kimberly L. Shaw
Planning Board Secretary

Material presented at the meeting:

The list of zoning amendments for consideration, emailed by me on 8/25/15.

Draft letter to the ZBA regarding the hotel, emailed by Jonathan on 8/27/15