

**HARVARD PLANNING BOARD
MEETING MINUTES
JUNE 9, 2015
APPROVED: JULY 20, 2015**

Vice Chair Erin McBee opened the meeting at 7:05pm in the Town Hall Meeting Room under M.G.L. Chapter 40A and the Code of the Town of Harvard Chapter 125

Members Present: Kara McGuire Minar (by phone), Erin McBee, Don Graham and Michelle Catalina

Others Present: Liz Allard (LUB Admin.), Bill Scanlan (Town Planner), Maren Caulfield (Harvard Press), Elaine Lazarus, Rich Maiore, Peter Warren, Sandy Chapman, Brenda & Philip Cunningham

Discussion with the Economic Development Committee on the Commercial District

Rich Maiore, the chairman of the Economic Development Committee (EDC), stated the joint hearing between the EDC and the Planning Board (PB) is being conducted to allow for the EDC to hear directly from individual PB members their opinions on the challenges with the commercial district (c-district) and what should be developed in this area. Sandy Chapman added the EDC would also be interested in how quickly would the PB would like to see development.

Catalina stated the current zoning bylaw is a challenge when it comes to development within the c-district. You have to be aware that any changes to zoning has to be one that will generate the required 2/3 vote at annual town meeting (ATM). Ideally you want to have the boards that are involved in a bylaw amendment united at ATM.

Catalina would like to see if the town can make an assisted living facility work; this use has not been addressed in any manner. There is a need to determine what this type of facility will mean for local services that would be affected by such a use. The Economic Development Analysis Team (EDAT) report has stated such a facility would need to be a for profit type. Some towns call for it as part of the subsidized housing inventory. Elaine Lazarus stated she does not think there has been success in getting the Department of Housing and Community Development to accept such facilities as affordable units.

Scanlan mentioned Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) has opened another round of funding under the District Local Technical Assistants; perhaps Harvard could apply for a draft assisted living zoning bylaw. Chapman asked if this would be for ATM 2016. Scanlan stated the funds need to be allocated by December 31st, so yes if the PB so chooses. The members of the EDC agreed that if task could be completed by the end of this year then it is worth pursuing. Catalina has concerns with the quality of documents from MRPC; it is not to say we would not have them draft a bylaw, but Harvard as well should be doing some research into what other communities are doing as well; others agreed.

Catalina stated the bylaw would need to be amended to allow such a facility as a use in the C-district and remove the need for a fire wall to create a building greater than 30,000 square feet, as these types of facilities are typically in excess of that. Those present discussed the pros and cons of the use being allowed by special permit or by-right. If by special permit, then what are the concerns to be addressed under that permit?

All agreed the PB should seek the creation of a bylaw amendment, while the EDC researches the associated affects on local services.

The restrictions placed on the c-district due to there being only private sewer and water was discussed. Catalina stated the support or revenue achieved by it is unclear to her. Peter Warren stated there is a developer who would be willing to share some of the cost to connect to water and sewer at Devens. At one point there was the thought that the price tag for obtaining those utilities from Devens was in the range of 12 million dollars. Chapman feels this is something that is not likely to happen; shared systems are what should truly be looked at. Water and sewer are a tough sell in Town, not only from a cost perspective, but from a fear of unintended consequences.

Maiore asked what is the vision for the c-district under the Master Plan. Scanlan stated the Master Plan is still a work in process.

McBee suggested in looking nursing homes as an allowed use as well to support in the continuing care beyond assisted living. Maiore stated the Council on Aging made the same suggestion. McBee would like to see the c-district more connected; easily get from on location to another without having to get back on to Ayer Road. Warren stated EDC agrees. The c-district contains a lot of open space that is under utilized. McBee stated the PB will need to determine how the design guidelines are going to connect with everything. There needs to be a trigger for the design guidelines on existing buildings to assist in creating a district that is user friendly in it entirety, rather than just within newly developed areas.

Graham stated to him it appears the Town is receptive to an assisted living facility. Graham asked if anyone knew what the occupancy rate is currently in the c-district. No one was certain of that number. Graham does not think there should be a focus on tax revenue when it comes to developing the c-district. To him it seems as if we should be focusing on the services we are leaving town for. Graham stated it appears to him that the EDC and PB has been talking for a long time about developing the c-district, but there has been no new growth, so it would be nice to have some wins to show how it could work.

Warren stated his proposal last year to increase the allowed size of a grocery store from 15,000 square feet to 20,000 square feet by right, and leave the max limit of 30,000 square feet, got shot down. 20,000 square feet would fit well for a restaurant or grocery store. Chapman stated the PB had addressed the proposal last year at ATM, who stated they would look at it this year. Catalina asked what would be lost by making this change; and could concerns (lighting, noise, traffic, littering) with these types of uses be addressed under site plan review. Catalina would like to see information towards amending these items by this October. McGuire Minar could support the 20,000 square feet by-right if it could be done right. Maiore stated the amendment may pass at AMT, but it still does not guarantee that business will be interested.

Maiore asked which topic, assisted living or grocery stores, should the EDC and the PB spend more time on; he would prefer assisted living.

Warren asked about the design guidelines the PB is working on. Scanlan stated as drafted currently the committee has determined there zoning changes that will be required in order for the guidelines to be implemented.

Maiore was asked why he has switched from pro grocery store to pro assisted living. Maiore thinks there is a need to look at an anchor of the district and be more enticing to the area. He sees a lot of potential with assisted living, more then a grocery, however he can see both uses having pluses in the c-district.

Chapman agreed with Graham; lets get a win here. Maiore stated the EDC is sick of talking; not feeling much of a function at this time and would like to see something happen.

Those present discussed traffic issues along Ayer Road and rotaries vs. traffic lights.

Those present appeared to be leaning toward the pursuing assisted living as an allowed use with the zoning bylaw, as the bylaw already addresses grocery stores. In addition to assisted living, residents are interested in retirement homes. There is a whole range of opportunities that would fit into Harvard. Maiore stated these are all things EDC has been discussing. One vision could be a medical mile for the c-district. It was mentioned there is a potential for new medical facility at Devens. Warren recently visited Carlson Willard which has a great design for the members of the community that are aging and want to remain in one location.

Maiore stated what he is hearing this evening is better services, better connectivity, and how is the Ayer Road Village Special Permit working or not working.

McGuire Minar wondered if there are any opportunities to get small businesses to come to Harvard rather than Devens, which primarily has larger businesses. Thatcher Kezer Senior Vice President of Devens Operations conveyed a desire to work with the local communities to assist in retaining and getting businesses in these communities.

How do we make the process understandable for those applying as Harvard does not have streamline permitting. Even without streamline permitting, McGuire Minar feels Harvard processes things quickly. Chapman suggested looking at the other surrounding towns and what there needs are to compare to Harvard. Lazarus suggested a guide to help people when they come in to apply.

McGuire Minar stated people are really interested in protecting the natural resources of Harvard rather than developing the c-district. Has the EDC considered highlighting the types of activities that make Harvard the rural community it is, by generating more attention to things like hiking trails, biking events, and the annual festivals?

McGuire Minar thinks early questions about assisted living facilities will focus on the costs to the town. Maiore suggest PB lay out some of the questions that will be raised and EDC will review the 2010 EDAT report, which lays out things that need to be addressed.

All in attendance agreed a letter should be sent to the Board of Selectmen encouraging a new traffic study along Ayer Road. Determine the opportunities of connectivity through grants for trails, path ways and bike ways. Include incentives for complying with design guidelines.

Although the master plan should lay out a vision for the c-district, those present did not want to wait for it to get things rolling.

The PB will discuss and finalize the DLTA grant at its next meeting.

ZBA Letter

Scanlan had previously distributed a draft letter to the ZBA in regards to the special permit application before them for 64 Warren Avenue. Member has no comments or revisions to the letter. Those present agreed the letter should be sent to the ZBA as drafted.

Adjournment

McBee made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:45pm. Graham seconded the motion. The vote was unanimously in favor of the motion.

Signed: _____
Liz Allard, Clerk