

**Housing Committee
Town of Pelham, MA**

Joint meeting between the Planning Board and Housing Committee

Meeting Minutes: December 16, 2019

Note: These minutes are based on notes taken by Housing Committee member Amy Spalding-Fecher and transcribed by Tilman Lukas. Please also review minutes from the Planning Board.

Committee Members in Attendance:

Tilman Lukas (TL)
Jim Lumley (JL)
Ruth Elcan (RE)
Amy Spalding-Fecher (AS)
Gail Kenny (GK)

APPROVED: 

Absent:

Barbara Cooper

Guests in Attendance:

Judith Eiseman (JE)
Leslie Laurie (LL)
Alexandra Dewey (AD)
Bill Pula (BP)
Robert Rowell
Otis Rowell
Two undisclosed residents

Action Items

- Meeting was called to order at 7:15 p.m.

Votes Taken

None

Committee Discussion Topics

8 Amherst Road:

TL updated the Planning Board (PB) on the status of 8 Amherst Rd. The Housing Committee (HC) continues to work with the sellers to build a Habitat for Humanity (H4H) affordable house. SWCA, environmental consultants, are working on reviewing any possible environmental hazards in the garage and adjacent areas. There are no records of the disposal of the house heating oil tank. Sellers are trying to get the documentation from the contractor. Site consists of 1.67 acres with 226 ft. of frontage. If we can increase frontage to 250 ft. we can create two lots for H4H. The abutter, Home City Development is willing to donate 24 ft. of frontage to the

site. We are working with Berkshire Design to prepare the deeds, and ANR (Approval Not Required) to be submitted to the PB. HC is taking this one-step at a time to minimize costs in case environmental review is problematic.

JE: Even if you meet the frontage requirements that does not necessarily meet lot requirements. Also need to meet storm water management requirements and topography needs to be reviewed.

Tilman read zoning requirements to the group.

JE: Looked up zoning requirements on website to see if there are additional requirements before this can become a legal lot. No other requirements required. Need to meet storm water runoff guidelines. Will also need permit from ZBA in order to fill existing foundation hole.

LL: Will Pelham residents be prioritized for these houses in a lottery?

Discussion: further discussion revolved around income limits, family size, and children. H4H will need to answer those questions.

18-22 Amherst Road-Petersen property & HRD Press

TL : The HC has heard from several sources that the PB is opposed to this project. We would like to know from each member what their concerns are.

JE: Where does project currently stand. Primary issues are safety and environmental concerns related to the river.

LL: Pete Wilson has specific issues that need to be addressed (Note Pete Wilson not at meeting).

JE/LL?: The project is not going to follow any of the zoning bylaws. Project obliterates all that the zoning that we worked so hard on in the re-zoning of the Village Center with the 40B.

Is there going to be enough parking? How safe are the entrances and exits? What if there is a sewer failure?

BP: Project is required to hook-up to the town sewer on the street. This will be a pumped system that must be designed by engineers and there are state requirements. All of this is very expensive and the last buyer of the site withdrew due to the cost. New owners are required to abandon or replace the existing system within two years. Current system has failed. Why is all of the concern about the new system rather than the existing one? This project represents a great opportunity to do it right.

JE: The PB does not have authority over this project. This is a Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) project. Speaking for myself, this feels like an end run around the PB process. The Casagrande property (Amherst Road) has become available and is more appropriate. There are safety concerns coming out at the corner of the road.

TL: I've driven down Amherst road a number of times recently and the Casagrande property also has serious problems with accessing the road. As part of the village neighborhood district PB should be working to help find measures to control traffic speed.

JE: It is not the PB's purview to control traffic. We had study done. Person to talk to is Rick Adamcek but he has no money. This is a town road but we depend on State for money for the road.

AS: Zoning plan was put in place without a plan for limiting traffic and no authority over it?

JE: This was not supposed to happen this quickly. Each development was supposed to add sidewalks as goodwill. We never saw a project of this size coming.

AS: Can't control the pace of development.

LL: The PB has taken no further action on this. We are concerned about conflict of interest and want to make sure procedures are in place.

RE: What procedures?

LL: Conflict of Interest. People could benefit from this financially. People who are leading this project could be in conflict of interest. Those on two boards need to address any conflict of interest and possibly recuse themselves. Need to file with the ethics committee.

JE: The PB sent a letter expressing these concerns to the Select Board. JE read the letter dated November 19, 2019. (summary- letter states that there are individuals involved with this project that serve on more than one board and this represents a potential conflict of interest. Those individuals need to disclose this and possibly recuse themselves from making decisions if a potential conflict exists).

TL: We want to avoid the town getting into a bickering contest between the boards. It will split the town. I have written a disclosure letter to the Ethics Commission (via Town Clerk) stating that I serve on two committees and also stated that I will recuse myself from any Conservation Commission vote regarding this project. There are many people in town on more than one committee, have they all addressed this with the ethics board? Judy, you serve on the PB and on the PCP. Have you filed a conflict of interest disclosure?

JE: I have not as of this time but will be doing so.

AD: The PB wants to make sure that there is transparency and visibility of this project in town. Should do mailings with info that HCD has given out and already available. Site plan, breakdown, etc.

AS: What did the town do to educate the public during the rezoning of village center?

AD: PB sent out postcards to the town about public meetings. This is another opportunity to educate people on what is going on in town.

RE: How many people came?

AD: We had many small meetings with good turnout. More informed town makes a better town.

LL: Help people know what the timetable is.

JE: We need plans because people don't know what they will be seeing. There will be surprises- walking along the water seeing 3 story building and concrete supports for the access rd.

LL: We want all committees to be on board, but you don't need the stamp of approval from the PB. I believe you are doing a good job keeping other committees in town up to date.

JE: At some point this is going to come into people's consciousness but PB will only have 30 days.

TL: We have met with the Historical Commission, Council on Aging, Health Board, Planning Board, Conservation Commission. Have not met with the Assessors-too early.

JE: My impression is that its been a credible approach. Questions are going to remain until plans are submitted. We don't know what is going on.

LL: But the PB is not against this project. It is human nature to have questions about the unknown.

Misc: Discussion about speaking for the PB vs. speaking on own capacity.

TL: What did you have in mind for this property when you were planning the village center?

JE: Montague Book Mill, a park, café.

TL: Aims for the village center was to increase the density, something that would bring people in. This brings people in to support businesses.

JE: This project is trying to do an awful lot on that property.

RE: The developers ARE listening.

JE: The more up in the air the more problems there are.

AD: Get more info out there.

JE: There is work being done at board meetings in preparation for this project-trainings, etc.

LL: Maybe we need to hear on a quarterly basis or updates that will keep people educated.

TL: I am sure developers will be willing to do that but they need to do a certain amount of work, in design phase, to give good answers before they can have more public meetings.

Other matters:

Meeting adjourned with the Planning Board at 8:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Tilman Lukas

References:

DHCD	Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development
HCDI	Home City Development, Inc.
CPA	Community Preservation Act
CPC	Community Preservation Committee
ZBA	Zoning Board of Appeals