

Planning Board Meeting
December 11, 2017

Called to order 7 pm

Attending Public: Gregory Chilenski, Ann & John Hondrogen, Cam Weimer, Karl Ryavec, Kristin DeBoer, Steve Boehmer, Barbara Cooper, Ruth Elcan, Dan Robb, Linda and Ralph Faulkingham. **Members:** Jenks, Eiseman (recording), Dewey, Wilson

The Chair gave an overview presentation and description of the genesis of the Village Center project. Town Center idea has been floating around for 30 years but with the advent of the sewer line from the Centennial Pumping station to the town line on Amherst Road, some options are now available that were more difficult to conceive in the past.

The Board is trying to imagine and help make possible a town center that is welcoming and a destination for Pelham people to congregate and hold events and perhaps do some business. Town's Housing Committee report has been useful and confirmed what many have understood for years: very little land in Pelham is developable and our options for creating affordable housing are limited given the realities of soil, water and ownership combined with conserved or public purpose lands. The UMass Design studio which took on the task of finding potential uses for the trailer park gave a final presentation was attended by Jenks and Eiseman and will be brought to Pelham in some form for display prior to Town Meeting in the Spring.

Discussion. The definition of Mixed Use and other issues were discussed along with questions that arose from the public. Questions from the neighbors most affected by the potential zoning change included desires for potential for stream and hiking access on the north side of Amherst Road, having traditional character maintained but somehow with regulations that mandate sidewalks and walkability. The road right of way on Amherst Road was discussed—will it accommodate sidewalks and will state allow it? State highway engineer would not allow it to be put into the design when the road was reconstructed but the need remains. Kristin DeBoer put forward the idea that since only 25 landowners are currently involved, it might be easier to get something done about sidewalks now rather than piecemeal owner by owner once ownership changes.

Pete Wilson voiced his opinion that “too much” regulation would inhibit development but that properties could be aggregated/acquired by a developer over time so that some more comprehensive building plan could occur. Wilson also discussed storm water management and storm drainage issues which led to comments from various neighbors on the state of drainage in the town. One thought was that restricting steep slope development on the north side of Amherst Road to protect the brook would further the goal of managing storm water and pollution into Buffam Brook. Street side design regulations very important on Amherst Road as well as all other roads.

Mixed use business opportunities have to be carefully considered—there was general agreement on Cushman Market concept as being desirable for Pelham. (Question: what is the zoning there that permits it in a residential area?) Returning from the current concept back to the original five zones in the Village Center might make sense since the undesirable outcome of the current plan might well create a potential strip mall on Amherst Road. Corners at Harkness Road and elsewhere might be danger points—closing in the options for business on the west end of Amherst Road and closing it at the easterly end as well seemed desirable to those in attendance.

What is “too crowded?” Ralph Faulkingham asked. He wants a more dense population in the area of the school so that Pelham can thrive; he noted that affordable housing was a major driver for this project. Wilson suggested that one of the challenges Pelham has is that people move out because property taxes are high. Members of the board noted that while we are trying to help the town grow sensibly, given limitations, business might bring more taxes without bringing more people to stress services on the one hand although on the other hand we do want to include places for elders, lower income citizens, as well as people with kids to reside to keep our school going.

Faulkingham suggested that the folks currently living in the proposed Village Center area have a special obligation because the value of the neighborhood will be increased. He wants to see a 40 year bonding issue or other funding discussed so that sewer can be installed. Jenks pointed out that we have discussed this with the Town of Amherst and will be taking it up and will be looking for grants. Rural areas development grant with Amherst might be considered since a designation of “rural area” just two miles away was noted in earlier documents according to one attendee.

Meeting adjourned 8 :30 pm