

Montague Planning Board

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July 24, 2018 7:00 PM

Town Hall – **Second Floor** Meeting Room
One Avenue A
Turners Falls, MA 01376

MEETING MINUTES

Members Present, Ron Sicard, Fred Bowman, George Cooke, Bob Obear, and Elizabeth Irving (associate)

Members Absent: Bruce Young

Staff Present: Walter Ramsey-Town Planner and Iliya Shumilov – Planning Intern

Meeting was opened by Ron Sicard at 7:00 PM

Approval of Minutes:

Motion by Bob Obear to approve the June 26, 2018 minutes as presented. **Seconded** by George Cooke. **All approved.**

Annual re-organization of the Planning Board: Chair, Vice Chair, Regional Planning Board Rep, Capital Improvements Committee Rep.

The matter was tabled due to the late receipt of a letter of resignation from Bruce Young. The Board decided that it was most appropriate to vote on this matter with a full appointed board in place. No action was taken.

Walter read a letter of resignation from Bruce Young who spoke very highly of his 12 years on the Planning Board. Bruce Young went on to praise both the members of the Planning Board, Walter Ramsey and Anne Stuart for their commitment, leadership and professionalism who work diligently on improving land use policies that help guide us into a sustainable future. The Board will miss his expertise.

Zoning Bylaw Update Workshop:

Walter Ramsey updated the Planning Board on the two recent public information sessions that he held at the Town Hall regarding the proposed zoning changes (7/18 and 7/24). Generally the changes have been well received by the public. The two sessions were well attended by a total of 40 people (residents and town officials)

Agriculture-Forestry and back lots

There were some comments “up zoning” Agricultural Forestry from ½ acre to 1 acre. Along with the established residential neighborhoods that are currently zoned Agricultural Forestry and would then become Residential. This includes Randall Road, Randallwood Drive and Winthrop Street which all have water and sewer access. Elizabeth Irving mentioned that 1 acre zoning does not go very far if you are truly trying to put land into protection. Walter cautioned that above one acre it could become a

taking issue and anti-snob zoning problem. Walter expressed that this zoning along with the Open Space design will in theory encourage folks to use this option while giving the farmers some development value on their land. George Cooke wanted clarification on backlots (a lot that has no road frontage). Walter showed him on the Agricultural Business District overlay where backlots are allowed. These consist of mostly prime farm land on Meadow Road, Old Sunderland Road, Old Greenfield Road and Ferry Road which allows back lots by special permit only. A backlot currently is considered to be a ½ acre lot with 2 acres going into protection. In the new proposed zoning a backlot would be: a 1 acre lot and would still require at least 2 acres going into protection. Fred Bowman noted that going forward the abundance of protected land might become a fiscal and growth constraint for the town. He suggests that it would be good to see all protected land on a map to give a visual impact of the number of acres being protected and the location of these parcels to have a complete picture. The Board agreed at 1 Acre for AF. There was a resident on Randall Road that has a home-steading farm and wanted their land not to be rezoned from Agricultural- Forestry to Residential. After meeting with them and hearing their concerns The Board asked Planner to look into whether Greenfield Road and part of Randall Road should be retained as Agricultural-Forestry.

Expansion of General Business District: two area identified as opportunities to expand opportunities for commercial growth in Montague. Both have water/sewer and access to well-traveled roads and are adjacent to existing commercial uses. No objections expressed. The Board agreed with this proposed change.

- Thomas Memorial Golf Course area is proposed to be rezoned. Owner does not object. Many development constraints (slopes, wetlands, riverfront). Community feedback support combination of open space and mixed use development with a housing component. General Business would allow this.
- From 194 Millers Falls Road (Ruben's Auto) to 253 Millers Falls Road (Hallmark Imaging Lab) at the entrance of Industrial Boulevard; this would enable a small commercial corridor. We are currently seeing conversion of one house in this corridor to business use. There is prime flat developable land with water/sewer across from the TF Water District Offices. We are currently seeing conversion to commercial uses at the two facilities at the entrance to the Industrial Boulevard (Franklin County Housing Authority offices and 253 Organic marijuana cultivation and dispensary).

Parking Standards

Representatives from the Montague Tree Committee were present at info sessions and agreed to review the proposed regulations and provide comments. Planner will facilitate this.

Solar Regulations

Representatives from Energy Committee were present at info session and agreed to review the proposed solar bylaw changes and provide comments. Planner will facilitate this.

Signage

There is general concern regarding backlit signs in the General Business and Historical Industrial districts. There are also some concerns over light fixtures and the control regarding style and possible light pollution. The Planning Board is not in favor of backlit signs as a general rule. Bob Obear's comment was that if you want to preserve the natural character and historic nature of the downtown area you should have an architectural review board to weigh in on these and other matters. There was also discussion regarding Accessory signage and do we want to regulate window signage and limit it to 50% of the windows being covered (Scotty's on the hill) or it is ok where there are cases for it such as a gun shop or a workout place. The Planning Board believes this for the time being is a low priority and won't continue to focus on it.

Neighborhood Business in Montague Center

In Montague Center the areas of the Bookmill, Alvah Stone along with the Common area (Library, Church and Common), Montague Village Store and the Post Office are being proposed to be rezoned to Neighborhood Business. There is a continuity of mixed use and diverse housing types in Montague Center. Historically, Montague Center has had a healthy mix of residences and businesses. However, all current businesses and multi-family are “grandfathered” uses. Current zoning does not permit the establishment of new businesses and severely limits the ability to existing businesses to alter their services. The village center is really one core area instead of two as was recently proposed. Neighborhood Businesses allows two-family housing and small businesses (less than 1,000 square feet) by right. This area already has two-families and some home businesses so it would be a logical change. This will also then connect the two sections of Montague Center and bring both the areas together under this proposed zoning.

Historical Industrial District

Planner’s proposal is to allow multi-family housing up to 75% of the floor area of the entire building. This is so that housing can be allowed in the old mills while allowing space for other commercial uses such as was done in Easthampton, MA. There will be more discussion at a later date regarding the division/percentage of floor area and if there should be commercial space and if the housing should be high-end apartments. Concern was expressed about the rigidity of this approach. Walter will explore further and make a recommendation. Demolition is currently allowed by Special Permit. Walter is proposing to make it easier to take down a building but for new construction a special permit would be needed. For demolition in a Historical Industrial District the feeling of the Board was that there should be a process/oversight to take down especially if we are trying to maintain a Historical Industrial District. The Planning Board would like to keep both demolition and new construction by special permit while allowing by right anything in an existing building.

Residential District

The proposal is to allow two-family housing by right and multi-family up to 4 units by special permit in residential districts. There were some concerns regarding adequate parking with this change and some more thought will be given to this especially the multi-family piece and the adequate parking being available if that were to go through. A point that was brought up is that many of the lots are non-conforming especially in the Lake Pleasant and the Patch areas and the hill where ½ acre lots are not the standard. The Board wants the land use regulation to reflect the existing and desired lot sizes within those areas.

Planner Report:

- Peggy Sloan from the FRCOG was able to be available and review the proposed bylaws and make some suggested edits and changes through an awarded peer-review grant. Walter will now make some additional changes to the document and will send it back to Peggy for a last proof read and then it will go on to the lawyers for a final review. Next steps are that Walter plans to do more public outreach and have a final draft for the September Planning Board meeting. The Selectboard will then need to approve the changes and from there on to a public hearing process and town meeting.
- Walter announced an upcoming public information session for the Complete Streets Prioritization Plan. Board members were invited to participate and provide feedback.

Motion by Bob Obear to adjourn the meeting at 8:13 pm. Seconded by Fred Bowman. **All approved.**

Approved by: _____ Date: _____