

Montague Planning Board

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April 28, 2019 6:30 PM

Meeting held remotely in accordance with the Governor's Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G. L. c. 30A, § 20, relating to the 2020 novel Coronavirus outbreak emergency

MEETING MINUTES

Members Present: Ron Sicard (chair), Fred Bowman (Vice- Chair), George Cooke, Elizabeth Irving, Bob Obear, Matt Lord

Staff Present: Walter Ramsey -Town Planner, Suzanne LoManto-Clerk

In Attendance: Peter Wackernagel, Max Marcus

6:30pm Ron Sicard opened the meeting.

6:30pm Approval of March 24, 2020 Minutes *MOTION to Approve March 24, 2020 Minutes by GC Second by FB Role Call Vote: MOTION PASSES*

6:32 PM Planner Report

Special Permit 2018-02: 253 Organic LLC request for administrative amendment to hours of operation. WR describes the proposed amendment to extend their evening hours to adjust to the market. Specifically Thursday-Saturday from 8am-9pm, Sunday from 5pm-7pm. Walter shared the request with other town departments. No concerns were raised by the police or other Town bodies. Walter recommends that Board could consider this a minor amendment. Ron agrees that this meets the Special Permit Criteria as a minor amendment and will not require further public hearing. There was previously concern about morning hours raised by the schools, but this is a completely separate issue.

MOTION by R.S to accept a minor amendment for SP 2018-02 file that extends evening operational hours at 253 Organic LLC as presented. F.B. Seconds, G.C. (Y) E.I.(Y) F.B (Y) R.S. (Y). The motion PASSED 6:37pm

Discussion: Planning Department operational adjustments

Walter is working primarily afternoons only for personal reasons related to COVID-19. Suzanne is full time. Office remains open for business. Workload is a busy as ever.

Status update on ongoing community development projects

*There has been interesting inquiries from the Eastern part of the State in light of Covid-19.

*Complete Street Grant: Sidewalks have been built on First Street. The bump-out on the corner of First and Avenue A is finished. The Town is waiting for flashing speed lights to be delivered.

*Small Business Relief: Town Hall is working with the State, Franklin County CDC, and the Towns of Greenfield, Shelburne and Buckland to redirect Block Grant Funds for small business relief. There are strings attached to this grant, so they are working to retool the program. Hopefully, Montague will have a program to apply to within the next month.

*Existing businesses are looking for facade improvements- an optimistic sign. RiverCulture is working on ways to infuse cash to local artists.

*Planning Department is positioning the Town for redevelopment grants in the near future. The department is thinking about what projects to prioritize and fast track so they are shovel-ready.

*Livability Plan Report from the February 1, 2020 community meeting was sent out last week. Walter had a video interview with the Franklin County Chamber about the plan. Hard Copies of the Livability Report are available and it is posted on-line.

*Financing for 38 Avenue A is proceeding. The investment climate is still there.

*Canal Gateway Project Design is in full swing. An issue emerged with the location of the pedestrian bridge after the geo-technical report: the abutment would be too tight for a handicap accessibility and vehicular access. A variance can take months. The Town is looking to put the pedestrian bridge on the other (south) side of the vehicular bridge which would require an easement from FirstLight Power. The delay with the design change could result in a better project. Department is working with Working with Tom Cusano, the new owner of Southworth, to source a gear to be used as part of a gateway sign.

*The Millers Falls riverfront access trail is complete. Well used already although it has not been announced.

*Strathmore Abatement will cost 450K to clean out hazardous conditions, including the smokestack which is coming down by July.

*The burn dump is on track to be capped this summer by Kearsarge solar, per special permit previously passed by the Planning Board.

Discussion: Railroad Salvage (11 Power Street) Site development Scenarios

Peter Wackengle was invited and has two creative ideas for the sites. It's a challenging site in tax title. The Town is hesitant to take possession; the EPA emergency takes away the hazardous materials which will make the site more attractive to developers. Bob Obear discloses that he is an abutter. Ideas:

1.) Keep RRS as an "industrial spectacle" and let it re-vegetate. No tax revenue but we would remove the blight. This idea leaves the annex without water and sewer.

2.) Limited redevelopment of the site. 15-20 Housing Units. Perhaps not enough for private investment to justify a new bridge.

3.) Maximum Buildout- 50-100 Hosing Units.
Requires maximum investment and full utilities.

F.B. discusses the importance of mixed income/ market rate housing. E.I asks about finding information about building housing that attracts families with children. M.L. comments that declining enrolment in our schools poorly utilizes resources which are also a cost. E.I. talks about how declining enrollment doesn't make people/ families want to move into Town. W.R: We do not currently have a study about how fiscal impacts of new people to town and long term financial projection. This speaks to the need for a comprehensive plan. There is general agreement that diversity in housing stock is the key. W.R. is cautions about how much we rely on tourism, which is the first industry hit in recession. Having more people living in town will help stabilize downtown. M.L. thinks the way forward is to figure out the balance between housing units and the cost of utilities required. More study is needed for this site.

Discussion: Town Hall (1 Avenue A) rear Development Scenarios

Images given to the Board shows the water perpetually ponds in the rear of the lot due to the high water table. The DPW is in the process of vacating the annex building, which opens up opportunity to decide what to do with the property. WR notes that there is a good opportunity to address the flooding/ storm water issues as we begin to think about redevelopment. The Board considered possibilities for new housing on the site or simply restoring portions of the site for green infrastructure/ open space. No consensus was reached. The Town also needs to consider whether a library may located here at some point in the future. The Board would be supportive of some green infrastructure to manage storm water and beautify the area while keeping redevelopment options open.

MOTION by R.S to adjourn. Seconded by F.B. VOTE: MOTION PASSES 7:31PM

Approved by: _____ Date: _____