

Montague Planning Board

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MEETING MINUTES

April 12, 2022 6:30 PM

Held in person at Montague Town Hall and via ZOOM

Members: Ron Sicard, Elizabeth Irving, George Cooke, Matt Lord.

Absent: Bob Obear

Staff: Suzanne LoManto, Walter Ramsey, Town Planner. (Zoom)

6:49pm: Meeting declared opened by Ron Sicard. Meeting opening delayed due to technical difficulties

6:50pm PUBLIC HEARING to consider a petition to amend the Montague Zoning Bylaws to adopt a Smart Growth Overlay District pursuant to MGL Ch40R. The district is intended to incentivize the creation of new housing units in Turners Falls by permitting dense development wherein at least 25% of units are affordable. The district includes two subdistricts: A) Griswold Mill, comprising 11 and 15 Power Street parcels 03-0-027 and 03-0-089 and B) First Street comprising parcels 04-0-0031 and 04-0-0024. Following the hearing, the Board will deliberate upon the comments and vote to consider final language amendments. Hearing has been duly advertised per MGL 40A.

Walter Ramsey (via ZOOM) presents slide deck titled “Town of Montague Smart Overlay Districts” which outlines 40R Massachusetts law and the requirements, benefits, and incentives for the Town of Montague. The Planner described two proposed subdistricts: Griswold Mill (11-15 Power Street) and, First Street. See *Exhibit 1*.

Public Comments

Christopher Couture property owner of First Street (Map 4 Lot 24) objected to the proposed zoning amendment in relation to his property on First Street. He feels that his property, an undeveloped lot that is posted “for lease”, should be used for commercial/retail. He is generally concerned that downtown retail is “drying up”. It was noted that the existing zoning (Neighborhood Business) already allows mixed use and residential uses and that the proposed overlay is an optional zoning program. Mr. Couture observed that there is lack of parking in the area to support residential. The town has data from a parking survey that shows that the adjacent municipal lot is greatly underutilized. Currently used by about 3 cars during the day and 5 during the evening winter parking ban. Mr. Couture feels aggrieved that the town did not construct a curb cut over the new sidewalk along the first street frontage of his parcel. It was noted by the Planner that the parcel still has vehicle access from L Street and the Second Street Alley. The town DPW and Planning Department is amendable to finding a solution to that issue when a development is programmed. Mr. Couture indicated a desire to develop a “commercial strip” on his property and framed the town’s plans to pass the zoning as part of a “big scheme” to eventually acquire his property. The Planner confirmed that there are no plans or intent for the town to acquire private property as part of the town’s strategy to address housing. Rather the town’s intent is to utilize underused municipal parcels for housing. Mr. Couture observed that the Power Street parcels are suitable for housing.

Jackie Stein: resident and member of the Montague Housing Coalition spoke in favor the town taking proactive action to address affordable housing issues in Montague. “I like the town having more control over the character of that (affordable housing).

Laura Heisig: resident of Patch neighborhood where Power Street parcels are located observed that that area (Sub district A) really lends itself to affordable housing”

Jen Audley: Submitted written comments via email:

Hi Walter - I recall that you asked for comments on the proposal to designate a couple parcels as 40R districts and I believe today is the deadline. I am sorry I do not have time to write a more formal letter, but I do want to express my support for this idea. Although we have had some notable successes w/ adding to the housing inventory by redeveloping abandoned buildings and repurposing the Montague Center School, the units added have not been "Affordable" or counted towards our SHI. The parcels you have identified are good locations for housing and I think it is important for the town to contribute to increasing the options for housing available for lower-income residents. One hope that I have is that some of the new affordable units will be large enough for families. It is particularly difficult for parents who are in transition to find places to live that meet DCF and the court's requirements. This is true for parents who are sharing custody, those who are in the process of being reunified after being separated by DCF, those who would like to be foster parents, grandparents and others providing kindred care, etc. I'd like to see Montague take steps to address that specific problem.

MOTION by Ron Sicard to close the public hearing. Seconded by Elizabeth Irving. VOTE: Ron Sicard-AYE, Elizabeth Irving- AYE, George Cooke-AYE, Matt Lord-AYE. MOTION PASSES. 7:45pm

7:35 Deliberation: The Board acknowledged Mr. Couture’s dissent. Chairman Sicard clarified that the town is not removing existing zoning regulations or forcing development on Couture’s property. Rather, the designation would merely grant additional flexibility for development that a private landowner may or may not choose to take advantage of. The Board agreed to keep the subject privately owned parcel within sub district B. The Board was glad to hear support from residents, including from a nearby resident to one of the parcels.

*MOTION by Ron Sicard to accept **recommend that Town Meeting adopt the Montague Zoning Bylaws Smart Growth Overlay District pursuant to MGL Ch40R**. The district is intended to incentivize the creation of new housing units in Turners Falls by permitting dense development wherein at least 25% of units are affordable. The district includes two subdistricts: A) Griswold Mill, comprising 11 and 15 Power Street parcels 03-0-027 and 03-0-089 and B) First Street comprising parcels 04-0-0031 and 04-0-0024. Seconded by Elizabeth Irving. VOTE: Ron Sicard-AYE, Elizabeth Irving- AYE, George Cooke-AYE, Matt Lord-AYE. MOTION PASSES.*

7:48 Planner Report

all other Agenda Items were postponed until the May Planning Board Meeting.

7:49pm MOTION by R. Sicard to Adjourn. Seconded By E. Irving. VOTE: Ron Sicard-AYE, Elizabeth Irving- AYE, George Cooke-AYE, Matt Lord-AYE. MOTION PASSES..7:50pm

Exhibit 1: Slide deck “40R Smart growth zoning”

Exhibit 2: Draft Smart growth Zoning Bylaw+ Map (see zoning file)