

Montague Planning Board

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MEETING MINUTES

July 26, 2022, 6:30 PM

Held in person at Montague Town Hall and via ZOOM

Members: Ron Sicard, Elizabeth Irving, George Cooke.

Absent: Matt Lord, Bob Obear.

Staff: Walter Ramsey, Suzanne LoManto, Steve Ellis

Consultants: Lee Morisette and Andrew Bohne (Dietz and Company)

6:30PM: Planning Public Workshop: Canal District Master Plan Community Workshop #2 Re-Envisioning the Canal District. MassDevelopment is helping the Town to develop a master plan for the 16 acre Canal District in Turners Falls. This area comprises the former industrial sites along the Canal from the Turners Falls-Gill Bridge to Sixth Street.

Presenters: Lee Morisette (Dietz and Company) and Andrew Bohne (PLACE Alliance) and Ben Murphy (MassDevelopment)

Public: Lisa Davol, Tim Di Christopher, Pam Allan, Jim Mussoni, John Furbish, Julian Mendoza, David Brule, Janel Knockleby, Christopher Clawson, Evan Gregg, Peter Chilton, Chris Menegoni, Kristi Bodin, Catherine Dodds, Suzette Snow-Cobb, Walker Powell, Jesse Groneman and others

Dietz and Company presented a slide deck *Entered as Exhibit 1*. Topics covered include an Investigation Report Update, The Strathmore Mill Status and Market Findings. After a short break, the Visioning Phase covered Site Design Options and Next Steps followed by community discussion.

Lee Morisette presented a map of the entire island although private properties are outside of the Canal District Master Plan process. The subject area is divided into five zones. A "Use Matrix" delineates the different requirements of fully occupied uses (business, residential and assembly), partially occupied uses (Industrial/Storage) and not fully occupied uses (Green Space). Feasible uses for each of the five zones were discussed individually.

The dangerous and deteriorating condition of the Strathmore Mill was discussed at length. The delaminating brick walls and other critical structural issues were shown to participants through numerous images. The catastrophic failure of the Strathmore is clear, with cost and access cited as obstacles for redevelopment. Building 11 is in better shape than the Strathmore, although the roof has collapsed. The 8 Canal Road site holds promise for climbing and lighting of the coal silo. Dietz and Company Architects have determined that the buildings are much worse than the condition reported in the 2005 Tighe and Bond Study. Therefore, they recommend total demolition of the Strathmore Mill and future "unoccupied" usage. There is potential for open space, light industrial and solar energy/ battery storage on the island.

Jim Mussoni asks if the Strathmore can be demolished and prepared for future use. Fire safety is a big concern.

Andrew Bohne responds that there could be a future for a building that does not require a lot of people or access. The goal is to make it safe, clean, and stable until that time arrives.

The Town Planner provided clarification on the ownership of the privately owned hydro facility inside the group of buildings recommended for demolition. The building is a condominium, in fair condition.

Chris Clawson asks about the water rights of the properties.

The Town Planner answers that most of the rights are gone except for 38 Canal and the private turbine previously

mentioned. FirstLight Power owns the water rights to the canal.

Evan Gregg asks if the private hydro facility has a willingness to work with the Town. The Town Planner responds that Eagle Creek has no desire to expand their footprint and has been in communication with the Town. This is an area that warrants further exploration and consideration by the consultants.

Elizabeth Irving encourages attendants to share any idea, even if it is a “bad” idea.

Chris Menegoni asks if it is possible for the town to buy power from the private turbine. The Town Planner responds that a “power purchase agreement” may be possible but very complicated with the current business model of the hydro facility.

Other ideas: solar, recreation, community garden.

Lisa Davol asks about the development of a Native American Cultural Center.

The Town Planner responds that the consultants will be collaborating with Native American partners about the best way to incorporate Native American heritage into the site despite access challenges.

Tim Di Christopher recommends creative/artistic uses for the Indeck site as well as large scale graphic work for the coal silo.

Andrew Bohne facilitates the second part of the discussion which looks at potential use for the five zones considering established limitations. The site is “tight” for even minimal access of emergency vehicles. The High Line, Domino Park, Gas Works, and Steel Yard were discussed as case studies of reinterpretation for public recreation use. The activation of Mill Ruins in Minneapolis prompted interest by the group. Highest and best uses for the site include trail networks, canoe/kayak access, recreation, entertainment, interpretation, and illumination. Existing conditions set the baseline.

Concept 1- Clean and returned to nature with future use possibilities.

Concept 2- Clean with recreational opportunities, trail networks without existing access points.

Concept 3- Clean with recreational opportunities but including more infrastructure and an additional access point.

Housing is seen as the highest and best use for zone 5 (Griswold site). Underground parking is suggested to provide views for the living levels. A four-level building is in-keeping with the scale of the historic buildings on the site.

COMMUNITY INPUT (Next Steps)

Jim Mussoni asks if the pedestrian bridge that the Town owns can be integrated into access to the island.

Andrew Bohne responds that the grade of the span is not the same on both sides of the canal. Stairs and ramps would need to be integrated and the 14’ right of way observed.

Rob Steinberg asks if it is cheaper to buy the hydro plant rather than bring power to the island.

The Town Planner responds that it is impossible to answer this on the fly, but he noted that Town would have to buy the facility at market value and lose the future tax revenue.

A large-scale sculpture park is suggested as revenue generating enterprise.

Tim DiChristopher suggests that the bricks from Strathmore can be reused in a creative/ interpretive way.

The Town Planner mentions that the Strathmore brick can also be crushed (processed on site) to fill grade issues.

Lee Morisette sees potential for the reuse of chimney brick to be used as part of an instillation as well as some

salvaged equipment.

Suzanne LoManto likes the industrial “ruin” concept and asks about how a project like that is staged. Andrew Bohne responds that the building would be completely decommissioned, and the “ruins” would be rebuilt after the site is cleaned.

Evan Gregg asks about the impact that the hydro facility has for redevelopment plans. Andrew Bohne responds that the building is an access “pinch point” although there is room around the building for interpretation.

At what point does the programming of a site require the installation of toilets? Is it possible to traverse the canal with a boat? The Town Planner responds “no” because the canal is privately owned and has numerous zero clearance bridges. It is more of a working waterway.

Can we incorporate golf carts to enjoy the island? Andrew Bohne responds that the grade of the trails will be under 5% so completely accessible- a wider path could theoretically accommodate a golf cart as well as users of all abilities.

The Town Planner adds that managing parks is expensive, and solar or battery storage should be considered as possible revenue generating uses. Wind energy is also suggested.

Lee Morrisette informs the attendants that Dietz and Company will bring the community input to their engineers and cost estimators. These results and findings will be presented in Community Workshop #3, date TBD

Approval of Minutes

Board did not meet in June.

MOTION by the chair to approve the minutes of May, 24 2022. Seconded by E. Irving. ROLL CALL VOTE: Ron Sicard (AYE), Elizabeth Irving (AYE), George Cooke (AYE) MOTION PASSES.

Subdivision Approval Not Required Endorsement: ANR 2022-03 Donald Richotte- 4 Randall Road Assessor's Parcel 21-0-023.

George Cook recuses himself from the discussion as he is an employee of the company that did the survey. The Planner describes the subdivision of the 4-acre lot with house from the remaining lot. The adjacent house at #6 Randall Rd does have a common driveway easement over the new house lot at #4 Randall Road. The remaining back lot is not considered a buildable lot because it does not have adequate zoning frontage. Lot does have via 40’ dog leg between 24 and 30 Randall Road. It was noted that much of the back lot is comprised of power lines and steep slopes. The Board cautioned against commercial use of the lot, as the plan identifies a gravel dirt bike track. The Zoning does not allow for commercial uses and the lot can no longer enjoy uses that are accessory to a single family house. It was noted that a commercial use of the back lot could create a future zoning violation.

MOTION by E. Irving to endorse ANR 2022-03. Seconded by R. Sicard. EI- AYE, RS- AYE. Motion Passed unanimously.

George Cooke rejoins the Board.

Subdivision #2017-01 Sandy Lane: Design amendment request by Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA) to remove natural gas line from approved Sandy Lane utility improvements.

FRTA provided a letter from Berkshire Gas (BG) dated 7/12/22 asking the FRTA to halt construction of the planned 4” natural gas line along Sandy Lane. They way that the line needs to be installed by Berkshire Gas contractors, and due to the longstanding moratorium, BG will not install new customer services. If FRTA

installs the line as designed and permitted, BG won't charge the line as it is against policy and best practice. Letter placed in DS 2017-01 file.

A BG representative indicated to Steve Ellis that he believes that Town could run a gas line along the side of the road in the future. Not requiring the work is a concession on behalf of the Town, but one that makes sense. Ron Sicard believes that the Town should accept the design amendment and allow the project to proceed without the natural gas line. The selectboard will have their own procedures to follow to amend the associated land covenants.

MOTION by Ron Sicard to accept the Subdivision #2017-01 Sandy Lane: Design amendment request by FRTA to remove natural gas line from approved Sandy Lane utility improvements. Seconded by E. Irving VOTE: Ron Sicard (AYE), Elizabeth Irving (AYE), George Cooke (AYE) MOTION PASSES 8:39pm.

Discussion about Planning Board representative to the Capital Improvements Committee.

The Planning Board has not appointed a representative to the CIC since Fred Bowman's resignation in March 2022. No members are currently able to commit. The CIC meets during the workday and represents and additional 1 to 2 meetings per month on top of the Planning Board responsibilities.

Steve Ellis leads the question "is it important for a Planning Board member to sit on the Capital Improvements Committee, and if not, what type of liaison do they want?" A by-law change is a possibility if the original premise is off-target.

The mutual understanding is that the 1999 Comp plan recommended a "reconstitution of capital planning" in Montague and one of the outcomes was to have the Planning Board at the table to ensure that elements of the Comp plan were implemented. In reality, many of the comp plan elements have been funded by grant programs that are outside the purview of the CIC and more aligned with Planning staff and Selectboard. The bulk of CIC business is on routine capital expenditure (new vehicles, building systems) while the Planning Department focused more on implementation activities. It was noted that Planning staff and the Selectboard's office also interface on much higher level than they did in 1999. The Board feels that their requirement to appoint a representative is redundant and unnecessary. Now Town has staff to help align the two committees.

The Planning Board supports a by-law change that would remove their responsibility to appoint a member and to instead allow the town moderator to make the appointment, as is done for all the other seats.

MOTION by Ron Sicard to request a bylaw amendment to remove an appointment by the Planning Board to be placed at the discretion of the Town moderator. Seconded by E. Irving. VOTE: Ron Sicard (AYE), Elizabeth Irving (AYE), George Cooke (AYE) MOTION PASSES 8:47pm.

Executive Summary of Downtown Parking Study- Discussion postponed.

Comprehensive Plan Updates. 350 Surveys have been collected to date. Surveyos open through end of August.

MOTION by E. Irving to Adjourn. Seconded by R. Sicard. VOTE: Ron Sicard (AYE), Elizabeth Irving (AYE), George Cooke (AYE) MOTION PASSES 8:53pm.