



**Town of Hamilton Planning Board
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Minutes

January 7, 2014

Welcome – At 7:35, Chairman Ed Howard opened the meeting of the Planning Board. Members Rob McKean, Peter Clark, Claudia Woods, Brian Stein, and Jeffrey Melick were in attendance. Planning Coordinator, Kristine Cheetham, was also in attendance.

Agenda Items

1. School Department Presentation by Phil Poinelli, SMMA

Bill Derry of the School Committee introduced Mr. Poinelli as a consultant working for the School Committee. He thanked the Planning Board for hosting the discussion and working together to better understand long-range planning efforts within the town. He informed the Board that the School Committee has an ongoing debate about the future use of the buildings and used an RFQ to hire the SMMA to conduct research and analysis.

Phil Poinelli outlined the research effort for the Hamilton Wenham Regional School District. He stated at the beginning of his presentation that the research and report were near completion and that all information should be available soon on the school website.

The process began with identification of stakeholders and an assessment of their goals. Stakeholders included the following: teachers, parents, selectmen (both towns), and the school committee. There were several vision sessions and roughly 45 persons attended each meeting. The research included reviews of educational systems in Massachusetts, the New England region, nationwide and worldwide. Many other systems employ longer days, different age groupings in buildings, etc.

The research got into specific demographic information for the Hamilton Wenham area. In particular, they found that there has been a consistent decline in population of roughly 6%. This will continue over the next 10 years for the elementary and middle school populations. The high school population is slated to have a 14% decline over the next decade. This is due in part to many students opting for private schools. If the choice students, roughly 115 at the high school, are no longer a part of the system – the decline reaches 30%. There are a variety of factors that contribute to the population decline such as housing, in-migration and birth rates. These are identified in detail in the report.

The Board members briefly discussed the role of the choice program in the schools as well as some concerns with regard to housing development. Mr. Poinelli also noted that the current high school student population is at roughly 720. Without the choice students that drops to 600. If you add the additional population decline of 14%, you are starting to lose teachers and educational opportunities. He noted that an important feature of the report is to establish a new “capacity #” for the sustainability of the high school academic program. These numbers are defined in many ways. The report states how the number is created for Hamilton Wenham. It involves student population, size of classroom, numbers of classrooms, curriculum, technology, etc. The efficiency of the building is reviewed from a total classroom space/size perspective.

He further explained that the three elementary schools have student bodies of 250 persons. This is technically small compared to many towns nearby. The report reviews a merger of all schools, a re-configuration of grades such as k-2 at one school and 3-5 at others, etc. Even if schools are merged, the student body remains the same therefore the teacher & aide volume remains static. Only a few facilities and administrative jobs might be altered if the schools merged. The overall cost/benefit for the future use of the elementary schools was reviewed.

Finally he noted that the report included analysis of repairs to the buildings versus new construction. He explained that while repairs to school buildings provide efficiencies, they still require an investment.

2. Accessory Unit Bylaw – K. Cheetham asked the group to take a first read of the accessory unit bylaw revision. The purpose of the revision is to consolidate the four types of accessory unit bylaws into one. The result will be a streamlined permit application that defines the allowed unit. The Board agreed to have a workshop discussion on Feb. 4, 2014.

3. Planning Board Roles & Responsibility – Chairman Howard reviewed the memo from town counsel. He stated his disagreement with the disclosure claim on the top of the memo and asked that his concerns be part of the minutes.

C. Woods agreed with a majority of the memo and noted her appreciation from town counsel. She noted that the Planning Board had an advisory opinion in the Site Plan Review but still questions how that opinion is addressed when the Planning Board disagrees with an applicant.

General Planning – P. Clark reminded the Board that general planning in the town has changed over the years. The Planning Board conducted a Master Plan and has amended bylaws. But now, he sees the planning for the community happening in small project based committees. J. Melick asked if the Planning Board or another Board conducted a plan, what was the reciprocity and responsibility for the members to educate themselves. C. Woods felt that they should be as informed as possible of other plans.

Annual Report – E. Howard noticed in the memo that the Planning Board was supposed to produce an annual report. K. Cheetham informed them that she recently provided a report for the year 2011 (which was prior to her employment with the town). The 2012 and 2013 have not been requested to date. The Board agreed that they wanted to produce an annual report regardless of use by town meeting or management. They felt that it was good policy and a requirement of state laws.

Planning Director – K. Cheetham distributed a draft document for the re-organization of the Planning and Inspectional Services departments. The town manager drafted the position. E. Howard did not find a job description on file with the Town Clerk. The members of the Board would like to see the current job description for the Planning Coordinator. K. Cheetham stated that her contract for employment was not tied to a specific job description. However, she would provide the Board with a few different descriptions that are on the planning computer files.

4. Open Meeting Law – K. Cheetham reminded the Board that the use of emails to ask questions about matters that are within the Board's responsibilities is a violation of the open meeting law. The recent email to the entire board was problematic. The OML states that an email to a quorum of the Board, even if it does not provoke a response, is a violation. She also reminded the Board that they can email the staff with a question, ask for research and ask for the information to be distributed with meeting materials or the question should wait until the Board is in public session.

5. Planning Board Budget – K. Cheetham informed the Board that the annual budget process is underway and a vote on the Budget will be required at the next meeting so that the Town Meeting Warrant can be finalized.

New / Old Business

1. Sub Committee Updates – There were no reports on sub-committee activity. K. Cheetham distributed a draft of the RFP for use of the Patton Estate. The draft is for review and discussion purposes only.
2. GPOD – Chairman Howard had a discussion with a resident about the GPOD and the potential re-use of the landfill for an anaerobic digester facility. He would like to schedule a discussion of the GPOD for a future date of the Planning Board to review the map and language in the bylaw.

Adjourn – 9:45 PM R. Mitchell made a motion to adjourn. B. Stein seconded. All voted in favor.