

/

HAMILTON PLANNING BOARD
MINUTES OF MEETING
March 10, 2020

Members Present: Richard Boroff, Rick Mitchell, Brian Stein, (Chair), Laura Walsh, and William Wheaton.
Planning Director: Patrick Reffett

This meeting was called to order in the Memorial Room, Hamilton Town Hall, 577 Bay Road at 7:04 with a quorum established.

Review of Various Potential By-law Texts

Business District – Mixed Use.

Patrick Reffett said William Wheaton was interested in advancing an amendment to the By-law Section 3.1.3. “Table of Regulations.” Mr. Wheaton recalled that he had spoken with the Willow St. neighbors and the FinCom. The neighbors reportedly wanted lower residential density (four to seven units per acre) while the FinCom was reportedly advocating for more commercial development. More commercial development was considered beneficial in lowering the tax rate. Brian Stein responded that there was no difference in the tax rate for commercial or residential development. While commercial development was perceived to use fewer services, Mr. Stein added that commercial development also brought in less money per square foot. Mr. Wheaton noted restaurant value was high and that the commercial revenues could be similar to residential revenues. Mr. Stein said condos had a higher value than rental units.

Rick Mitchell said the only property that would be applicable to the potential change would be one two-acre parcel on the east side of Willow St. near Asbury St. Winthrop School could also be rezoned commercial. William Wheaton said a variety of retail uses, such as a former hardware store site which could be developed in the area. Richard Boroff said the retail use was limited by the number of retail customers who would frequent the locations. While brewpubs were a current popular commercial use in neighboring towns, it was decided Hamilton would not be able to support one.

Rick Mitchell added that neighbors were concerned with the proposed three floors and would be equally as unhappy if the potential building on Willow St. were three floors of commercial use. The neighbors’ concerns regarding traffic, noise, parking, and lighting were appropriate, according to Mr. Mitchell. Mr. Mitchell said the FinCom was in support of the Willow St. project and that having residential mixed use would increase the valuation of the project. Brian Stein noted the bigger picture was that there was a shortage of apartments and condos in Hamilton and these units were in the downtown area near transportation. William Wheaton said residents wanted the downtown area to be developed commercially, which was the historic tradition. Mr. Wheaton wanted mixed use with mostly commercial use supplemented by

residential use. Mr. Wheaton was concerned on the tax impact of having students in the small units.

Brian Stein said research on the Willow St. site had proven that retail or office space on the second or third floor was difficult to rent as was indicated by the vacant upper floors of the Pallazola building on Willow St. Richard Boroff said he thought professional offices would be appropriate on the upper floors. William Wheaton thought a satellite office would be appropriate for those who did not want to commute to work or work from home.

William Wheaton said he did not want to limit the scale of development in aggregate but would rather limit the proportion of residential use compared to commercial use within a specific building project. Density as defined by Floor Area Ratio (FAR) was discussed and found not to be applicable. Mr. Wheaton suggested allowing up to 50% residential in combination with at least 50% commercial. Rick Mitchell said he would not support the change as the Town needed housing and the downtown area was the perfect place to put it as there was transportation within walking distance of the development. The concept was supported by Transportation Oriented Development (TOD).

William Wheaton responded that he did not see the need for small apartments but did find a need for a vibrant commercial center. Rick Mitchell and Brian Stein said they wanted both a vibrant commercial center and more housing by having commercial on the first floor and housing above, which would make the development as a whole more economically viable.

Rick Mitchell noted that most residents were unaware of downtown development and the Town was heading for a financial cliff. William Wheaton referred to the Master Plan, which indicated that .5 to one student would be added per development unit. Discussion ensued regarding how many students would be added for a one or two unit apartment versus a single family home and which would impact the schools more. Mr. Mitchell noted the declining student population and the need to streamline the schools. Brian Stein added that the town needed a balance of apartments, single family homes, and commercial use and that a prohibition on one should not be allowed because a few people didn't like it.

The average household currently used \$10,000 in services per year. The proposed units would bring in about \$5,000. There was a .4 child per house on average currently. Members discussed who would likely live in the units and whether or not they would be revenue generating or consuming. Units would likely rent for \$1,800 for a one bedroom unit.

After determining that members did not support the amendment, William Wheaton decided to withdraw his proposal. Director of Planning & Inspections Patrick Reffett said the common denominator to having a viable downtown was having people who can walk to the retail shops, restaurants and other commercial entities while expending disposable income within the downtown. Mr. Reffett said Hamilton's downtown was commercially anemic with frequent

turnovers in retail spaces and need more vibrancy. Brian Stein added that half of Railroad Ave. retail spaces were professional offices. Downtown was not a destination. Mr. Reffett added that boutique retail uses and really good service businesses that people will drive for, like Honeycomb Bakery, will always be successful and should be emulated. Laura Walsh noted the quality of the establishment would lead to the quantity of the traffic to it.

TDR

Rick Mitchell wanted to ensure flexibility for developers. Brian Stein wondered how the Board could preserve the properties worth preserving and allow development elsewhere. It was decided that setting up a development fund to purchase open space was the best vehicle as setting up receiving and sending sites was too complicated and politically inappropriate. Mr. Stein added that even with the establishment of the bank, the Board needed a tool that gave a developer greater density than currently allowed for which a deposit into the bank was granted. Patrick Reffett compared the system to that of the Inclusionary By-law. A ten acre parcel in one acre zoning would be allowed 15 clustered units in exchanged for a fraction of the profit being deposited into the fund. Otherwise a priority area would need to be established with a purchase of development rights completed. After the preservation bank was established, priority parcels would be noted. Mr. Reffett said Town Meeting would need to give the Selectmen the power to use the funds for the purchase of the acquisition or the funds could go back to the residents. The Schools would not be able to access the money.

Martha's Vineyard had a land bank and Patrick Reffett would find other examples to review. Wenham had a flexible development By-law without the land bank piece. William Wheaton noted that the Town might be eligible for grants by using the land bank for buying open space. It was agreed the Board would consider the combination of a flexible development By-law and a land bank. The flexible development By-law allowed for many different types of development on one parcel. Mr. Wheaton suggested collapsing the OSFPD and Estate By-law into the flexible By-law and determine what land in town should be preserved. Mr. Reffett suggested the Board consider how much density would be appropriate and how much funding would be required. Mr. Wheaton suggested no set number be established and verbiage indicating that the density and funding be left for negotiation.

Board Business

Minutes

Motion made by William Wheaton to approve the minutes of February 4, 2020.

Seconded by Richard Boroff.

Vote: Unanimous in favor.

Motion made by Brian Stein to approve the minutes of February 18, 2020.

Seconded by Rick Mitchell.

Vote: Unanimous in favor with Laura Walsh abstaining due to absence.

Liaison reports

Richard Boroff updated the Board regarding the Open Space Plan. Joe Saachi (MAPC) would be presenting the plan on March 26, 2020.

Future Meetings

The public hearing posted for March 17, 2020 would be retracted.

Discuss preparations for 2020 ATM.

Chairman Stein asked if the Board should vote specifically to formally withdraw the Zoning Bylaw Amendment. Patrick Reffett advised him affirmably as the proposed article was no longer pending based on the Board's prior discussion earlier in the meeting.

Motion made by William Wheaton to withdraw the proposed By-law change to Section 3.1.3 at Town Meeting.

Richard Mitchell seconded.

Vote:

Brian Stein – Yes

Laura Walsh – Yes

Rick Mitchell – Yes

William Wheaton – Yes

Richard Boroff – Yes

Peter Clark

Peter Clark has notified the Board at the February 18 Planning Board meeting that he was retiring after 50 years of service on the Planning Board. His dedication would be announced at Town Meeting by the Selectmen. Patrick Reffett would also contact Bruce Tarr and Brad Hill for a commendation for Mr. Clark. A ceremony would hopefully be planned.

Adjournment.

Motion made by Rick Mitchell to adjourn at 8:26 pm.

Seconded Richard Boroff.

Vote: Unanimous in favor.

Prepared by:

Marcie Ricker

Attest

Date