

HAMILTON PLANNING BOARD
MINUTES OF MEETING
Via Zoom 830 0266 8754
June 16, 2020

Members Present: Richard Boroff, Peter Clark, Dan Hamm, Rick Mitchell, Brian Stein, (Chair), and William Wheaton.
Planning Director: Patrick Reffett,
Others Present: Marnie Crouch and Dave Thompson.

This meeting was called to order by Brian Stein at 7:00 pm with a quorum established via Zoom.

Presentation and comment upon Draft Open Space Plan (Plan)

Richard Boroff said the Plan, which had been distributed to members, was written by Joe Saachi of Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC). William Wheaton thought the Plan emphasized the acquisition of the Meadowbrook parcel on Essex St. Mr. Wheaton thought in the past, other parcels had been debated to determine a collective sense of importance. Mr. Boroff responded that being a priority parcel did not mean it would be acquired but would allow for the fund raising for a possible acquisition in the future.

Richard Boroff asked that the Planning Board write a letter of support for the Plan. The Selectmen would also be asked for a letter of support. As an edit to the document Patrick Reffett suggested adding Joe Domelowicz, Town Manager under the section that included involved Town staff as he was instrumental in getting resources for the effort and connecting the Open Space Committee with MAPC.

Motion made by Dan Hamm to approve the Open Space and Recreation Plan and authorize Brian Stein as chair, to write a letter of support by the Planning Board.

Seconded.

Roll Call Vote: Brian Stein – aye, Peter Clark – aye, Dan Hamm – aye, William Wheaton – aye, Rick Mitchell – aye, and Richard Boroff – aye. Unanimous in favor.

Review of Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary (GCTS) Property Related Information.

Patrick Reffett reported he had been in contact with Jay Trewern (Vice President of GCTS) who said the college wanted to sell certain residential units within the campus. Reffett had electronically distributed to members maps of the campus including driveways and buildings. Sixty dorm units were in Buildings A and B, which were being considered for sale. GCTS planned on keeping 80 units for students and staff in other buildings. There were approximately 210 units on the 118 acres of the campus. The Planning Board had previously approved an ANR (Approval Not Required) for 19.75 acres of developable land on Bridge St. within the land area of the property. The campus was in the R1B District (1 acre) with a portion in the Groundwater Protection Overlay District. Surrounding zoning districts were R1A (20,000 sf) to the north, RA

(two acres) to the south and R1B to the west. The Assessor's Office valued the campus and property at \$50.8M for the fourteen buildings and land. The 118 acres of land was valued at \$3.37M. The property was non-taxable, which was one reason the land value was so low. By comparison, Myopia, which was three times larger, was valued at \$10M. The 19.75 acre ANR property was valued at \$920,000.

Of the 210 residential dorm units, 81 were two bedroom, 13 were three bedroom and 117 were one bedroom or studio units. Primary access was via Essex St., Bridge St, and Woodbury St. The distance from the campus to Route 128 was 3.7 miles. The Town's GCTS Task Force had previously discussed the school's intention to sell off residential apartments and land for capital purposes, maintaining 80 units for students, selling the 19.75 ANR parcel, and maintaining the academic portion of the campus for continuing educational operations.

Patrick Reffett had contacted Town Counsel to determine whether the Hamilton Development Corporation (HDC) could be given jurisdiction of the GCTS area upon Town Meeting approval by two thirds vote. Also whether the HDC had the legal ability to purchase the property or pursue the property within a right of first refusal with the college's voluntary approval. Reffett reported the HDC, if so approved by town meeting to add the area to their jurisdiction would have the ability to rent, lease, sell, or improve the property within the existing zoning and issued permits. The 1970 permits had been reviewed by Town Counsel and found to be still in effect. The HDC would have the option to amend the existing special permit for market rate housing or other uses. The Town also had the option of rezoning the area or pursuing a friendly 40B. GCTS was reportedly actively contacting developers to sell residential units and land.

Dave Thompson said the GCTS Task Force was originally commissioned to work with the college to reach a compromise regarding the PILOT arrangement. The GCTS President identified the affordable housing needs. Other discussions of the Task Force included having a cell tower on site and the reservoir with accompanying storage and infrastructure. Mr. Thompson noted that Buildings A and B were surrounded by wetlands. Handicapped access would need to be improved, which would possibly lower the number of units available. Another set of buildings was noted as future potential affordable or senior housing units. On the top of the hill was another building with 147 units inside, which Mr. Thompson thought the school would want to keep. Mr. Thompson thought one acre, larger homes would be appropriate on the 19 acre ANR parcel as the site was difficult, which would be prohibitive for small units.

Patrick Reffett said he had spoken with the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) regarding being able to impose deed restrictions on existing units that had been upgraded. DHCD said they would be happy to work with the town for the project. Mr. Reffett said the college wanted to pursue the proposal through a private entity as part of a solicitation which the College had undertaken. Rick Mitchell wanted to think in advance, if the entire property became available in the future, to ensure revenues would be maximized with costs would be minimized.

Discussion ensued regarding the viability of the college. Dave Thompson noted the beautiful building on top of the hill and the open space. Mr. Thompson suggested members take a walk on the site to familiarize themselves with it before envisioning what kind of business or function might be suitable for the site. Members compared the site to that of Penquin Hall (Mullen Advertising) and Biolabs.

Dave Thompson was concerned with traffic as Bridge St. as it was unable to handle large capacities. The campus of GCTS was serviced by one central waste water treatment facility so the separation would require service agreements. Dan Hamm noted that if the apartments were surrounded by wetlands, a separate septic system would be difficult to construct. Currently waste was treated and pumped up the hill to a central facility. William Wheaton suggested hiring a consultant to determine if the buildings could be purchased by the Town.

Rick Mitchell responded that the Town was not in a position to purchase anything but could facilitate the sale to maximize revenue for the Town. Theoretically, the Hamilton Development Corporation's area of work could be expanded to work toward a potential solution similar to the Willow St. project. An overlay district could be created to cover the campus, allowing the Town to determine the uses. Brian Stein agreed an overlay district would help the Seminary and the Town. By expanding the potential uses, the value of the parcel increased. If units became affordable, the Town also benefited. Mr. Stein said another option would be for the Seminary to sell the land to another school with the Town hoping for PILOT benefits. Mr. Mitchell suggested contacting MAPC or Barr Foundation for guidance.

Dave Thompson said the Town should be careful discussing the topic publically at this point. William Wheaton said it could be presented to the Seminary that it had come to the attention of the Planning Board that changes were occurring and the Board was willing to work with the school. Brian Stein noted the Town was involved due to the cell tower and reservoir located on the site. The Town hoped to maximize the benefit to both parties. Mr. Thompson said David Smith had an ongoing conversation with Scott Sunquist, President of the college. Mr. Thompson hoped someone from the Planning Board would meet with Mr. Sunquist and Mr. Smith.

Board to consider and potentially vote regarding authorizing the Chairman to sign plans and decisions on behalf of the Planning Board during the Covid timeframe.

William Wheaton made motion to authorize the Chairman to sign documents that were approved on the Board's behalf between now and November 1, 2020.

Rick Mitchell seconded.

Roll Call Vote: Richard Boroff – aye, William Wheaton – aye, Dan Hamm – aye, Rick Mitchell – aye, Brian Stein – aye, and Peter Clark – aye. Unanimous in favor.

Board Business

Minutes of June 2, 2020

Motion made by William Wheaton to approve the Minutes of June 2, 2020.

Seconded by Rick Mitchell.

Roll Call Vote: Richard Boroff – aye, William Wheaton – aye, Rick Mitchell – aye, and Brian Stein – aye. Peter Clark and Dan Hamm abstaining due to absence. Unanimous in favor of voting members.

Liaison reports

Patrick Reffett said the CPC needed a member to be the liaison to the Planning Board, which would be determined after Town Meeting.

Adjournment.

Motion made by William Wheaton to adjourn at 8:19 pm.

Seconded by Rick Mitchell.

Roll Call Vote: Richard Boroff – aye, Rick Mitchell – aye, Dan Hamm – aye, Peter Clark – aye, and Brian Stein. Unanimous in favor.

Prepared by:

Marcie Ricker

Attest

Date