

HAMILTON PLANNING BOARD
MINUTES OF MEETING
Via Zoom 854 1984 5083
Password 319586
July 21, 2020

Members Present: Corey Beaulieu, Marnie Crouch, Dan Hamm, Rick Mitchell, Brian Stein (Chair). William Wheaton and Richard Boroff.
Planning Director: Patrick Reffett.
Others Present: Heather Ford, Russ Tanzer, David Wanger, Bob Stallard, Scott Sunquist (President, GCTS), Neil Zolot, Jay Trewern (VP, GCTS), David Smith (GCTS Committee Chair, Finance Committee). Jeremy Garzoli, and Jack Lawrence.

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

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

Brian Stein introduced the topic by saying the Town had heard that units might be converted to affordable housing, which would benefit the Town. The discussion's purpose was to begin a dialogue and hear facts to the extent GCTS would be able to provide them.

Scott Sunquist said the small university had many staff members from town and the surrounding area. Mr. Sunquist understood the State required a percentage of affordable housing. Mr. Sunquist thought it best that the university get out of the real estate business and focus on education. He mentioned that potentially twenty percent of small colleges might not restart after Covid 19 but GCTS would survive as much of its programming was already online and very popular. This summer was even better than last summer for GCTS. Land had been sold to develop housing along Bridge St., which would bring income to Hamilton. The school was considering selling all or part of the apartments and had issued a solicitation to selected developers for proposals. Of the five respondents, two were being considered, both of which supported 40B apartment use. Mr. Sunquist continued that the school was a Christian entity, which wanted to be a good neighbor and provide affordable housing. A bid had been received for apartment buildings A and B the previous week.

Pres. Sunquist said GCTS was doing fairly well with four campuses and the on-line program. The Hamilton campus was important as it offered one and two week classes on site and was the headquarters for the multi-facility college. Students would come to the area for the short term classes. A religion and political forum was planned and would follow the standards of the Anglican Church, which had been held on site. A concert was also planned to raise funds for the Accord Food Pantry in Hamilton.

Vice President Jay Trewern said the school was not selling the area on the top of the hill (location of academic buildings). While GCTS did not want to impact the surrounding neighborhood, Mr. Trewern said the apartments already existed. The two RFP respondents are considering pursuit of 40B developments. The other three, who were not chosen to continue, did not consider use of 40B. There are currently 60 affordable units in Buildings A and B. It was asked whether the new owner would rent or sell the units, but Mr. Trewern could not commit to that aspect as that determination would be part of the developer's respective proposals. Mr. Trewern said all 210 units would likely be sold with possibly two of the buildings being devoted to affordable housing. A sprinkling of affordable units could be implemented as well. Rick Mitchell noted that if all 210 apartments were owned by the same entity, even though only 60 were affordable, all would be counted to the Town's percentage requirement as more than 25% would be affordable rentals. David Smith noted that 80 units would be set aside for faculty and students with the remainder being market rate open to anyone. All units would be taxable although affordable units would likely be taxed at a lesser rate than market units. Mr. Mitchell asked that the Planning Board be part of the 20 acre ANR property discussion.

Scott Sunquist agreed the long term goal of the campus was to maintain a seminary campus at the Hamilton location was excellent. Chairman Stein said the Planning Board would want to help in the event the entire property was sold as it was currently zoned residential and would need to be rezoned. Mr. Sunquist responded that selling the apartments was a major fix for the seminary as it would give funding for endowment, which created new stability for the college. Jay Trewern said written documents had been received from two parties and GCTS would act as quickly as possible.

Patrick Reffett would work with the Assessor to understand the taxable income to the Town and would provide the information to the FinCom and Planning Board to discuss the financial impact. Russ Tanzer said the affordable units would pay a discounted tax rate but would potential pay \$75,000 to \$100,000 annually to the Town for the two buildings. If a greater density for the site was proposed, the existing ZBA permit would need to be reopened.

Review and Discussion of Various Potential By-law Language Changes.

Patrick Reffett had distributed a draft of the Flexible Residential By-law and recalled Land Use Attorney Mark Bobrowski's contribution to the concept as well as that the Housing Master Plan and the Housing Production Plan which had both recommended increased density. Mr. Reffett noted areas to simplify and areas to focus upon in Wenham's Flexible Zoning By-law. The implications for the Town's tax base and members' comfort in presenting at Town Meeting would be considered.

Rick Mitchell suggested changing the "Purpose" to include retaining financial stability for the Town by expanding the Town's tax base to provide high quality education and services. Marnie Crouch wanted to add emphasis for the preservation of trails, wildlife habitat, and corridors, which were written into other By-law Purposes. William Wheaton noted that a wide set of

purposes would be more flexible. Mr. Mitchell hoped to allow for a diversity of housing without a loss of taxes.

Brian Stein hoped to balance the open space with tax revenue while protecting land areas worthy of protection. Marnie Crouch suggested having a fund that developers paid into and the Town would decide which parcels to acquire. The fund would promote the identified purposes. Parcels the Town hoped to acquire had been defined in the Open Space and Recreation Plan. Mr. Stein said considering the highest and best use of the few parcels available for development was important. Mr. Stein added that some should be developed and some should be preserved. A definition of both should be included.

Brian Stein said the Planning Board should show how the By-law would reduce tax liability. Members discussed the implications of various sized lots, connections to trails, and keeping land on the tax rolls rather than having the land donated to non-profits and becoming non-taxed in perpetuity. Marnie Crouch suggested creating a sliding scale for determining the value of parcels. Bill Wheaton said the value would be determined on a case by case basis. Mr. Stein suggested getting rid of a specific percentage but Ms. Crouch said if there wasn't an open space requirement, there would be no basis for requiring a development to pay for increased density. Mr. Stein responded that the base density was allowed by the zoning and if a request to increase it was made, a monetary cost would be defined. A benefit to the Town would need to be established such as open space, value, taxes, or infrastructure.

William Wheaton suggested that the Board not write formulas as they created unintended consequences. Rick Mitchell said density affected price points. Canterbrook was two units per acre. The condos on Willow St. were seven units per acre. Mr. Mitchell said the target density would be four units per acre. Patrick Reffett suggested using the number of bedrooms relative to the required septic regulations.

Brian Stein suggested if parcels were connected to trails, open spaces should be mandated and if not, a density bonus would be allowed in exchange for money in the fund. Rick Mitchell suggested looking at the density bonus points offered in the Senior Housing matrix. The Senior Housing By-law allowed for up to four units per acre. Marnie Crouch and Mr. Mitchell would each write what they thought a developer would need to provide to receive four units per acre and then compare their suggestions. Mr. Mitchell thought downtown should be a different density than the agricultural areas of town. Mr. Stein noted that the Route 22 area was actually quite dense. Mr. Stein added that no one moved to Hamilton for a dense community but given the financial environment, some people would be willing to allow for density on the right property in certain areas of town.

William Wheaton wanted to see a fiscal impact study regarding various units that would bring in more taxes compared to spending for costs such as schools. Rick Mitchell said Judi Barrett had done the study but other members thought the study was inconsistent. MAPC could be contacted

for their opinion. Rick Mitchell suggested giving the By-law to the developer of Patton Ridge (Berry) and Canterbrook (Larry Smith) to see if they thought it would be enticing for them as developers to build a project. Mr. Wheaton suggested contacting Tom Ford for his opinion.

Board Business:

Review/approve Meeting Minutes of July 7, 2020.

Members would vote at the next meeting.

Staff Reports

Special Town Meeting would be held November 7, 2020. Members thought the By-law would not be ready for presentation at that time.

Liaison Reports

William Wheaton appreciated the current staff of Gordon Conwell. Marnie Crouch said the land at GCTS was sold to a trustee of the college and that the land would be sold again as a distribution.

Adjournment.

Motion made by William Wheaton to adjourn at 8:43 pm.

Seconded. Marnie Crouch.

Roll Call Vote: Brian Stein – aye, Marnie Crouch – aye, William Wheaton – aye, Dan Hamm – aye, Rick Mitchell – aye, Corey Beaulieu – aye, and Richard Boroff – aye. Unanimous in favor.

Prepared by:

Marcie Ricker

Attest

Date