

## February 18, 2003

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mrs. Averill, Mr. Bender, Mr. Byerly, Mr. Charles

MEMBER ABSENT: Mr. Buck

ALTERNATES PRESENT: Mr. Rimsky, Mrs. Roberts, Mr. Sabin

STAFF PRESENT: Mr. Chalder, Mrs. Hill, Mrs. Luckey, Mr. Wood

ALSO PRESENT: Mr. Boling, Mr. Field, Mrs. Payne, Press

Mr. Bender called the meeting to order at 4:05 p.m. and seated Members Averill, Bender, Byerly, and Charles and Alternate Roberts for Mr. Buck.

Mr. Chalder noted he would begin working on a first draft of the Plan, hopefully having it ready by 3/11 so that it could be distributed to Members for review prior to the 3/18 Special Meeting. If the necessary work is completed within that time frame, a townwide informational meeting would be held in April or early May. Mr. Charles asked if the draft could be posted on the Town website. Mr. Chalder said this could be done, but the Commission must discuss it first.

Mr. Wood explained discussion booklet #5a, Business Zoning and Village Development, was based on discussions at previous meetings and contained ideas for consideration, not recommendations for implementation. He circulated a corrected copy of the map on page 5. Mr. Chalder explained the importance of the property located behind Washington Supply. He noted it sits up high, is very visible, and is taken for granted. He advised the Commission it would be risky to leave it unprotected because any development here could dramatically change the character of the Depot.

Mr. Wood suggested the Commission consider functional rather than geographic zoning business districts. The village business districts would be people, not vehicle oriented, support a mix of commercial, residential, and institutional uses, and recognize the historical and aesthetic differences of each of the existing village centers. Gateway business districts would be linear but would discourage strip type development, would allow some Special Permit uses not permitted in village districts such as light manufacturing, commercial kennels, self storage facilities, etc., would be more vehicle oriented, and would serve as entrances to the village centers. Mr. Bender thought the concept of two sets of regulations, one for village centers and the other for gateways, would not be accepted by the Town because of the perception that each of the existing business districts is unique and so requires unique regulations. Mr. Wood said he had reviewed the Zoning Regulations and had found the business district regulations were very similar and suggested revisions be modeled after the recently revised Marbledale regulations. Mr. Chalder thought there would be more of a fundamental difference between village and gateway districts than there was between the uses now permitted in the existing business districts. Therefore, he thought it would be possible to "collapse" the current four districts to two. Mr. Bender found the gateway district concept acceptable, but suggested instead, two gateway districts be added to the four existing business districts. In general, the Commissioners supported the gateway district concept, but were divided about how to accomplish this. Mr. Wood pointed out that even if the two district concept were utilized, it would be possible for the villages to retain some of their different permitted uses. Mrs. Roberts thought perhaps Planning should recommend gateway districts be established, but leave the details up to the Zoning Commission.

Mr. Charles noted a major problem for the village centers is the speed of traffic travelling through them. He suggested pressure be taken off the Depot by encouraging development in the gateway area. Mr. Chalder pointed out the poor traffic circulation in the Depot due to poor sight lines and off set intersections. He said a future roundabout or rotary at the intersection of Rts. 109 and 47 might slow and calm traffic.

Mr. Charles wanted to include the Canoe Brook area and the Primary School property in the Depot business district. He said these have unique characteristics and would contribute to the diversity of the area. He also noted the importance of the greenway through the Depot district.

Techniques and tools for development in the business districts were discussed. Mr. Chalder noted that under the current Zoning Regulations what we like about Washington can not be built, nor are pedestrian friendly village centers possible. Mr. Bender noted the Planning Commission could not write the Zoning Regulations needed, but could describe its vision for the future of the Town .

The Depot was discussed in detail. Mr. Chalder said this section of Town had gotten away from a pedestrian streetscape, sense of place, and walkable centers. He recommended an in depth study of the Depot, which would include recommendations for appropriate building and uses. He thought the separation distance between buildings here was now too large and said two story buildings closer together with ten to fifteen foot setbacks would have a traffic calming effect. He used Kent with its on street parking and sidewalks as an example of a pedestrian friendly center. Mr. Bender thought residents would rather drive than walk, but Mr. Chalder thought they would walk if they had the opportunity. Mr. Bender also thought driving on streets without on street parking was safer. Mrs. Roberts thought the Commission should take the lead by providing a pedestrian friendly center, noting how well this concept works in English villages. Mr. Chalder suggested it would be possible to work with the DOT or perhaps to take on the responsibility for some sections of road from the DOT to implement traffic calming techniques should the Commission decide it wants to do so.

Parking was considered. Mr. Chalder said the Zoning Regulations incorporate the concept of off street parking, but on street parking right in front of their destinations is what people want. On street parking, he said, helps to create an intimate streetscape by using parked cars to separate the sidewalk area from the traffic. Potential maneuvering of cars in and out of parking spaces and trees planted along the sidewalks help to slow the traffic down. He thought the Commission should encourage uses that would take advantage of on street parking and noted diagonal parking is the most efficient. He noted parking could also be provided to the rear of buildings.

Mr. Rimsky noted before the flood the Depot had a lot of on street parking and was more of a village center. After the flood, however, it was redeveloped with a different set of values and the 1950's style planning interfered with the pedestrian friendly village center concept. He reminded the Commission that the Depot's present configuration has existed for only a short time and is not in keeping with most of its history. For that reason he thought the Commission's ideas for the Depot need not be restricted by what currently exists there.

Traffic circulation was briefly discussed. Mr. Chalder noted this is a crucial problem in the Depot. He presented a sketch map with several loop roads added to the existing Depot street network to show one possible solution/improvement to the current traffic problems. To undertake a thorough study of the traffic pattern as part of an in depth study of the Depot, he advised the Commission more accurate maps of the area would be needed. Mrs. Payne noted the existing topography in the Depot would greatly limit the feasibility of alternate traffic plans. The Commissioners voiced interest in the idea of aligning the intersection of River Road and Titus Road by rerouting River Road to the river side of Parks Drug Store.

Factors that limit potential uses of the old Town Garage property were briefly discussed. These included the channel encroachment lines, the Inland Wetlands Commission 100 foot regulated area, the floodway, and the Zoning Commission's 200 foot setback from the Shepaug River. Ideas to address and help to alleviate these factors included decreasing the zoning setback in the business district and repairing the Rt. 47 bridge so the flow of the Shepaug is less restricted. Mr. Chalder suggested Milone and MacBroom, an engineering firm that specializes in water resources, do some mapping of the property including location

of the floodway and calculate the capacity of the existing bridge. Mr. Chalder noted the Zoning Commission had adopted its strict 200 foot setback for a good reason, but thought Zoning needed the ability to modify it without proving a hardship. Mr. Bender asked him to include this recommendation in the draft Plan.

Mr. Charles suggested the in depth study of the Depot be completed within two years. Mr. Chalder said the Commission or a special committee could be responsible for this study, but advised that the more parties involved, the more successful the resulting plan would be.

Mr. Bender recommended the Zoning Commission permit clustered residential units in the R-1 district on the condition they be served by community water and septic systems. He noted flexibility of the Zoning Regulations was needed because the Town has a condo shortage. Mr. Chalder said recommendations for alternative development patterns had been discussed and would be included in the Plan. Mrs. Hill noted currently condos would be permitted only if they were applied for under the Affordable Housing statutes.

MOTION: To adjourn the meeting. By Mr. Charles.

Mr. Bender adjourned the meeting at 6:07 p.m.

FILED SUBJECT TO APPROVAL

Respectfully submitted,

Janet M. Hill  
Land Use Coordinator