

March 18, 2003

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

ALTERNATES PRESENT: Mr. Rimsky, Mrs. Roberts

ALTERNATE ABSENT: Mr. Sabin

STAFF PRESENT: Mrs. Hill, Mrs. Luckey

Mr. Bender called the meeting to order at 4:07 p.m. and seated all Regular Members. He noted it was being held at the request of Mr. Charles and so turned the meeting over to him.

Mr. Charles said he was concerned that a number of topics that require additional discussion beyond the scope of the update of the Plan of Conservation and Development such as village centers keep coming up. Mr. Bender agreed there is a vast difference between the general update of the Plan and a detailed study and plans for improvements in one specific area. He noted detailed studies were beyond the scope of the current contract.

Specific topics to be addressed in greater detail after the completion of the update of the Plan were noted. These were 1) the Depot, including traffic patterns and most appropriate use of the old Town Garage property, 2) housing, (an in depth report had been recommended by the Housing Steering Committee), and 3) village centers, including New Preston and Marbledale. Mr. Bender noted it had been already decided one recommendation in the updated Plan would be that a specific study of the Depot be made. Mrs. Luckey said she had asked that the Plan address two issues, neither which had been covered to date; the best use for the old Town Garage property and traffic problems in the Depot. Mr. Bender said these would be considered in the in depth study of the Depot because they were beyond the scope of the current contract.

Mr. Rimsky thought it was very important that the revised Plan strongly recommend these three in depth studies, perhaps by using language to elevate their importance and to clearly indicate the Commission thinks they are imperative. He thought the Plan's graphic design should highlight these as priorities rather than submerge them in with the rest of the Plan.

Mr. Charles suggested the Commission set a specific time frame and budget for completion of these studies. Mr. Bender did not think a budget could be established until the Commission had gone through the interview process with interested consultants. Mr. Charles noted problems with organizing the Housing Steering Committee even though the Open Space Steering Committee had recommended it and asked if the Planning Commission was in a position to mandate these in depth studies. Mr. Bender said the Commission could make recommendations, but could not control the political process.

Mr. Buck asked if the New Preston and Marbledale districts could be merged. Several Commissioners thought this would be controversial as they have separate identities. Mrs. Roberts pointed out unified regulations for the two districts had been discussed and rejected at the last meeting.

Mrs. Roberts noted the 1993 Plan had its priorities and although it had taken over ten years, a substantial number of them had been addressed. She hoped the updated Plan would shift its focus to housing, preventing sprawl, preserving the quality of the Town's "hamlets," etc. She thought study of the village centers would be a good way to combine housing issues, preservation of Town character, and ideas for reinforcing commercial activities. She thought the Town already had such a strong open space policy that this would not have to be emphasized in the new Plan. She stressed the updated Plan should progress from 1993 issues to current issues

Regarding affordable housing, Mrs. Roberts thought the Commission should not lose sight of the peoples' dream to own their own piece of land with their own house. She said the Town needs a fund to help with the purchase of land or smaller houses as they are put up for sale to help keep this kind of ownership affordable. She also thought the Town had to work to end the "not in my backyard" attitude that many people have about affordable housing and that mixed uses (commercial on the first story with residential above) should be encouraged in the village centers. Rimsky agreed a sense of ownership and overcoming the NIMBY attitude were important.

Mr. Rimsky thought the Town should work harder to educate residents that land donations can be made for affordable housing as well as for open space. He did not think the Town was successfully getting the word out that donations for affordable housing were as important and valuable as those for open space. He noted the Conservation Commission would soon be able to accept open space on behalf of the Town, but there was no mechanism in place to accept parcels for affordable housing. He thought a detailed study of the village centers should include an evaluation of how to manage population growth within them.

Mr. Charles thought the Plan should be committed to maintaining a diverse community. He said the Town should strive to provide affordable housing for those who work here.

Mr. Charles said, too, that transfer of development rights used as a tool to allow denser development in the village centers should be investigated.

Economic development was another issue the Commissioners were not sure would be adequately addressed in the Plan. Mr. Bender noted he had asked several meetings ago whether Planning should recommend the establishment of an industrial zone. It was thought that if an industrial zone were established, somewhere near Rt. 202 would be the logical location, but Mrs. Hill pointed out there are many wetlands areas along that highway. Mr. Bender noted Bridgewater has several small plants off Rt. 67, which are hardly noticeable from the road. Mrs. Roberts, however, did not think the community would support an industrial zone in Town. Mr. Rimsky thought bringing various types of commerce into Town would be beneficial, thought additional agricultural uses should be generated, and thought computer related uses in a campus-like setting could be encouraged without the need for an industrial zone. It was noted schools and real estate are the two main employers in Town. Mr. Charles and Mr. Rimsky thought that schools no longer employ long term Town residents. Mr. Rimsky said teachers used to be Town residents, but that most now live out of Town or in private school campus housing. He thought the Town had reserved large areas of open space to preserve the rural character and although this did benefit the community, it was at the expense of affordable housing. He hoped the Plan would come up with a way to offset this.

Mr. Bender left the meeting at this point. Mr. Charles presided and seated Mr. Rimsky.

Mr. Charles thought the Commission should send Mr. Chalder a list of concerns that should be emphasized in the updated Plan. Mrs. Hill thought it was too late for a list to make the first draft and that Mr. Chalder already knew the Commission's priorities. She thought it would be more productive to have this discussion after review of the first draft.

Mr. Rimsky expressed his concern about the schedule and asked when would the draft be done and when would there be a public meeting. He was concerned there had not been as much public input as he had expected. Mrs. Hill noted this was partly because of the problems encountered when working on the Conservation section and the long delay waiting for Steep Rock to inform Planning whether it would accept all open space on behalf of the Town. Instead of having a separate Conservation informational meeting, this would now be included in the first draft discussion. Mr. Rimsky felt consensus building and

public participation was important so the community would feel involved and think better of the Plan. He also thought Planning needed the support of the Conservation Commission. Mr. Charles suggested putting the first draft on the Town website. Mrs. Hill responded Mr. Bender had said previously he did not think this should be done until the Commission had first reviewed and revised it. Mrs. Hill said Planimetrics planned to hold a public meeting upon completion of the first draft and also noted she and Mr. Bender were working on a brief article for the **TownTimes**.

Mr. Charles asked those Commissioners who had not yet done so to list their concerns.

- Mrs. Averill: Traffic-traffic patterns, whether to have a stop light at the intersection of Rt. 47 and 109, whether River Road should be realigned with Titus Road
- Mr. Buck: Housing-the whole spectrum, not just affordable. The Commissioners thought the Town should stop using the term, "affordable," since there was prejudice against affordable housing.
- Mr. Byerly: Thought the major concerns had been addressed.
- Mr. Charles: In addition to concerns previously stated: Town sewer systems, limited equity parcels

Mrs. Hill said she was concerned the preservation of rural character may not be adequately covered. She thought conservation of open space and rural character were separate issues; that a Town could have open space and still not remain rural. She circulated papers she had previously written to Planimetrics on this subject.

It was noted these minutes would be forwarded to Mr. Chalder to advise him of the Commissioners' concerns.

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

Mr. Charles adjourned the meeting at 5:28 p.m.

FILED SUBJECT TO APPROVAL

Respectfully submitted,

Janet M. Hill
Land Use Coordinator