

May 25, 2004

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mr. Bender, Mr. Byerly, Mr. Charles, Mr. Rimsky, Mrs. Roberts

ALTERNATE PRESENT: Mr. Frank

ALTERNATES ABSENT: Mr. Buck, Mr. Fairbairn

STAFF PRESENT: Mrs. Hill, Mr. Sears

ALSO PRESENT: Mr. Plattus

Mr. Bender called the Special Meeting to order at 4:10 p.m. and seated Members Bender, Byerly, Charles, and Roberts and Alternate Frank for Mr. Rimsky.

Mr. Charles introduced Mr. Plattus from the Yale School of Architecture.

Mr. Plattus noted the School of Architecture focuses on urban planning and half the projects taken on by its Community Design Center are for smaller towns. He stressed the school does not compete with planning professionals, but works closely with them, is eager to collaborate, and will provide continuity. He said most of the work by students is done during the summer.

The Community Design Center undertakes studies on parking, traffic, village district guidelines, housing, streetscape improvements, commercial corridors, etc. As architects, he noted they can visualize what the implications of a plan shown on a map will be in twenty years. He stated the Center was wary of projects where there was no broad based public input.

Mr. Bender advised Mr. Plattus that conducting the Depot Business District study was a major recommendation of the recently completed Plan of Conservation and Development. He asked if the Commission should try to draft the RFP letter itself or seek professional help. He noted there are many correlating issues to be considered and he did not know how much detail to get into in the letter so that they would not be missed in the study.

Mr. Plattus explained there were first two questions the Commission should answer. 1) Are there any salient issues or opinions driving the process? He said different types of studies result from landscape architects, architects, planners, etc. because they all work in different ways. The combination of issues to be considered would determine what kind of consultant to hire. 2) How far into the future will the study project? He said there should be long term action items and goals included if the study is worth doing. He noted landscape architects are good at looking at long term considerations.

Mr. Sears asked when in the process would the Commission specify the values it wants included in its vision. He thought this should be addressed early on. He also thought the study would be incomplete if it did not include a specific process for implementing the study recommendations. Mr. Plattus explained when the Commission has reasonable confidence it has identified the core values, it would be ready to draft the RFP, but if it could not yet articulate them, it was not ready. He noted the values should be articulated as concisely as possible. He also said the RFP should specify whether the study will include a draft regulatory system such as village district regulations.

The concept of village centers was discussed. Mrs. Roberts noted the Town supports open space to preserve rural character, but the Commission thinks strong village centers are needed to stop sprawl and to protect Rt. 202. Mr. Charles said people no longer understand how a village works because they have evolved into automobile oriented, regulated suburban areas. Mr. Plattus agreed towns are rediscovering the values implicit in village centers; being more compact and pedestrian oriented and having a degree of "socialability" and attractiveness. When arriving in the Depot, he said he was struck by the physical

environment, which frames the village center, and the amount of asphalt. He noted, too, in Connecticut there is an economic market for smaller residential units in or within walking distance of village centers and advised the Commission to address this issue.

Mr. Bender asked how much of the local unprofessional vision should be incorporated in the RFP as it could restrict the successful bidder from offering additional ideas. He also asked if the Commission should ask the bidders to determine what the vision of the Town is. Mr. Plattus said the consultant would help to put the vision into words and regulations, the RFP should provide a general vision, the bidder would offer ideas about that vision, and his presentation should include his opinion of what direction the study should take. Mrs. Roberts asked if the RFP should list all the problems in the district. Mr. Plattus said it should. He then advised the Commission to request an explicit description of the "deliverables" to be provided such as village district regulations, overlay zoning district, and specific methods to control use and design. He said it was better to err on the side of greater specificity as that would result in better feedback.

Mr. Sears noted his concerns about implementing the plan. Mr. Plattus responded the way to get the plan realized is to create the framework to encourage private investment. Mr. Sears asked when the private section would be asked for input. Mr. Plattus said this could either be early on so they would be educated about the process or after the Commission has decided what type of development it wants and where. He recommended workshops for focus groups such as local developers and realtors to find out what they know about the local market.

Mr. Charles described the limited Town government staff. Mr. Plattus said the Town might want to consider hiring a design consultant on a part time basis to review applications and to mediate between developers and the Zoning Commission.

Mr. Charles thought it was important to obtain public input very early on in the study process. He thought community support might help the Commission obtain additional funding from the Board of Finance if it is found that the \$35,000 approved is not adequate.

Mr. Plattus said he was impressed with the Town's Plan of Conservation and Development because it was more specific than most. He thought this document supplemented with a few public meetings or a public survey could be used as the basis for the RFP. He recommended Planimetrics for converting the Depot Business District pages of the POCD to a first draft of the RFP. Mr. Bender asked if Planimetrics were to draft the RFP based on these pages, would it ethically impact on that firm's right to be the ultimate bidder. Mr. Plattus did not think this would be a problem.

Mrs. Roberts noted the negativity expressed by the public when the Commission presented the concept of a transition zone in Marbledale as one way to enhance the village center. She attributed this to a deficiency in the education process. Mr. Plattus noted the public is generally not visual and so has difficulty understanding abstract concepts. Therefore, he recommended a consultant who is design oriented and can present a clear visual picture to the public. He said firms should be asked how they will help the Town to visualize concepts as part of the interview process.

Mr. Plattus advised the Commission to be ambitious about whom it interviews for the job. He thought that due to the character and reputation of the Town, "top people" would be interested in conducting the study. He also advised the Commission to judge the applicants on what other experts they can involve in the study. He offered to provide a list of recommendations, noting there were many qualified firms in New England and some farther away with local collaborators.

Mr. Charles asked how, at the end of the process, the study would be turned into regulations. Mr. Plattus

said the consultant hired should be able to accomplish this as part of the study.

Mr. Byerly asked how far into the future the study should aim. Mr. Plattus said it should address the immediate future (2 to 5 years) with short term guidance as well as include a long term vision of at least 20 to 25 years.

Regarding the RFP, Mr. Plattus stated the Commission should make it clear its resources are limited and ask each bidder to clearly list all the components of the budget proposal. The Commission must be sure it understands whether attendance at meetings, cost of additional consultants, printing, etc. are included in the budget or would cost extra.

Mr. Plattus said he would be available to answer any future questions the Commission might have and offered to help evaluate the responses to the RFP.

Mr. Bender thanked him for his input.

MOTION: To adjourn the meeting. By Mrs. Roberts.

Mr. Bender adjourned the meeting at 5:40 p.m.

FILED SUBJECT TO APPROVAL

Respectfully submitted,

Janet M. Hill
Land Use Coordinator