

April 4, 2006

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mr. Charles, Mr. Frank, Ms. Gager, Mr. Rimsky, Mrs. Roberts

ALTERNATE PRESENT: Mr. Fowlkes

ALTERNATE ABSENT: Mr. Fairbairn

STAFF PRESENT: Mrs. Hill

ALSO PRESENT: Mr. Sears, Press

REGULAR MEETING

Mrs. Roberts called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m. and seated Members Charles, Frank, Gager, and Roberts and Alternate Fowlkes for Mr. Rimsky.

Consideration of the Minutes

MOTION: To accept the 3/7/06 Regular Meeting minutes as written. By Mr. Frank, seconded by Mr. Fowlkes, and passed 5-0.

MOTION: To add subsequent business not already posted on the agenda. By Mr. Charles, seconded by Ms. Gager, and passed 5-0.

Other Business

Depot Study: Mr. Rimsky reported that he and Mr. Sears had attended a recent meeting of the Washington Business Association. He thought the Assoc. was generally supportive of the study. Parking was the critical issue discussed. The idea for improvements to Bryan Plaza (diagonal parking, median down the middle, and more parking spaces on the west side) was considered an intelligent approach to improve traffic flow and increase parking capacity. Problems with parking over at the municipal lot near The Pantry were noted. Mr. Ackerman, owner of The Pantry, complained employee parking for surrounding businesses was using all of the spaces on his private property so there were none left for his customers. Mr. Sears had suggested the Town make improvements to the lot on the old Town Garage property for employee parking. This idea was well received, but it was stressed that lot would have to be better maintained and well lit so the employees would feel safe using it.

Mr. Rimsky also noted the Assoc. had voiced its support for the improvements proposed to the Texaco station property.

Mrs. Roberts asked whether making the Depot more pedestrian friendly had been discussed. Mr. Sears said, no, that basically the business owners wanted people to be able to drive to them and find convenient parking.

Mr. Sears noted he had walked the Depot and had counted 210 existing parking spaces. He had observed the municipal lot by The Pantry and found all 19 spaces were filled by employees before 8:45 a.m. even though The Pantry employees were already using the old Town Garage lot. He said he would send the business owners awareness letters to point out to them that the Old Town Garage lot will be reserved for employees so the spaces closer to their businesses can be freed up for customers. He said he would work on keeping it clean, removing the snow, and getting lights. It was suggested small signs be posted to

direct vehicles to the municipal parking lots at the old Town Garage and behind Town Hall. It was also suggested the spaces at the old Town Garage lot could be marked as reserved parking for the various businesses.

On street parking was briefly discussed. While this was not considered an immediate priority and was considered by the Commission to be a "last solution," it was thought that there was nothing inherently wrong with it if it was done correctly. Mr. Sears noted it would provide additional spaces and would also calm traffic. Widening Titus Road to accommodate parking along one side was another possibility that could be considered in the future if the parking problem worsens.

Mr. Sears read a letter he had written to the Planning and Zoning Commissions in which he urged them to consider short term parking needs in the Depot a priority issue and ideas such as the transfer of parking rights and payment in lieu of on site parking. He asked that they take into account the larger picture of parking in the Depot when considering the requirements for each lot. He then read a portion of the letter he received from the Washington Business Assoc., which contained a unanimous resolution passed as a statement of support for plans to improve parking in Town.

Mrs. Roberts advised Mr. Sears that any new lights should be appropriate to preserve the character of the village. She urged him to review material on lighting in the Land Use Office prior to making any purchases.

Mr. Rimsky noted this was the first time the Commission had received a strong positive response from the community regarding a specific area of the Depot study. The Commission hoped to use this experience to move forward with other achievable projects such as installing a walking path along the river and around the Depot and making the Depot more pedestrian friendly.

Mrs. Roberts reported that some of the members of the Housing Committee supported the idea of housing behind the Town Hall. She suggested the driveway be extended to circle the Town Hall.

Mr. Sears said there was public support and so he wanted to move ahead with plans for parking improvements. Because he did not want a disjointed approach and since the Planning Commission has a comprehensive view of the Depot, he asked if Planning would be the entity to head up the project. Mr. Charles did not think the Commission was ready to do so because it had not yet developed a complete plan. He suggested the Planning and Zoning Commissions and Board of Selectmen hold a public meeting to bring in Wilbur Smith to discuss additional ideas. Mr. Rimsky agreed that Zoning should be included in all discussions and that a comprehensive approach was needed. He also agreed with Mr. Charles that the public should be brought into the process so it would feel it had contributed to the solution. Mr. Fowlkes thought it made sense for Planning to begin implementation of the Depot study with improvements to parking because in assessing the public reaction to the study it was evident a major concern of many residents was parking. He recommended the Commission try to make the improvements to Bryan Plaza that could be done under the existing authority and nothing beyond that at this point. Mr. Rimsky thought the Commission should also work on the walking path and improvements to the parking at the old Town Garage property because they were two immediate goals that could be accomplished.

Discussion followed on how to draw the public into the process. It was the consensus the Board of Selectmen should schedule a meeting with the Planning and Zoning Commissions and invite the business community. It was not decided whether to hold an evening or weekend meeting. Mr. Charles thought Wilbur Smith should be included, but the rest of the commissioners thought that would be more appropriate at a later meeting.

Mr. Sears briefly spoke about the progress being made in cleaning up the old Town Garage property. He

expected the area within 100 feet of the river would be cleared of debris, materials, and equipment by fall. Ms. Gager asked if there was access to the old Town Garage property from GW's, and suggested if there was, GW employees could also use the old Town Garage parking lot.

Walker Brook Farms Subdivision II/Rt. 109, New Milford: Ms. Gager reported the public hearing was continued to 4/6. She thought the Commission should continue to show its interest and concern by attending. She asked if Mr. Sears had written to the New Milford Planning Commission regarding Washington's concerns about emergency services and Walker Brook Road, noting that he should do so before the close of the hearing. Mrs. Roberts said she would discuss this matter with him the next morning. The Commission raised several questions including 1) Would Washington EMTs receive payment for services in New Milford? 2) How much would it cost the Washington Vol. Fire Dept. to respond to a call in this N. Milford subdivision? 3) How does the mutual aid agreement between towns work? It was also noted the state Plan of Conservation and Development states the area of the proposed subdivision is not recommended for development. Regarding Walker Brook Road, it was noted the Washington portion was approved as a scenic road, it can't currently handle large equipment, and Washington does not want to make improvements to it. Mr. Charles also stated it is not adequate to serve as an emergency route for the 78 houses proposed. Ms. Gager said she would get a copy of the minutes of the last session of the public hearing so that Mrs. Hill could circulate copies to interested Members.

Referral from the Zoning Commission/Revision of the Zoning Regulations/Coverage, Setbacks, and Parking in the Depot and New Preston Business Districts: Copies of the proposed revisions were circulated and Mrs. Roberts asked the commissioners to write down their comments for discussion at the next meeting. Mrs. Hill noted Zoning's public hearing was not scheduled until the end of May.

Correspondence

Complaint from Mr. Greenstein Re: Activities in the Town Right of Ways: It was noted Mr. Greenstein's complaint had been discussed at the last meeting and the commissioners had been asked to think of ways to address the problem. Mrs. Roberts said she had studied the responsibilities of the Tree Warden and thought he should be more involved with decisions about tree cutting in the right of way. It was noted, however, the Tree Warden would not be aware of the location of open space set aside by the Planning Commission to preserve the streetscape. Mrs. Hill questioned whether it was his responsibility to protect the rural character or just to deal with diseased trees. Mr. Rimsky recommended a future article in the Town newsletter inform the public that it should contact the Town for permission before conducting activities such as rebuilding stone walls and cutting trees in the Town right of way. He also suggested that municipal employees be given guidance about the importance of maintaining the trees along town roads. Mr. Frank suggested the Conservation Commission address this issue when it updates its land use pamphlet. Mrs. Hill suggested information also be posted on the Town website. Mr. Charles recommended a class for realtors. He also thought the Town should develop specific guidelines regarding what is and is not permitted in the Town right of ways and then implement appropriate regulations to govern these activities. It was thought a Town Ordinance would be more effective than a zoning regulation as property owners would not be able to apply for activities on property they do not own. Mrs. Hill noted she had already referred this matter to the Conservation Commission as she had been asked to do at the last meeting. Mr. Charles thought this problem was probably not peculiar to Washington and suggested Mr. McGuinness at the Council of Governments be contacted for input. Mr. Rimsky asked if a notice could be included in the next tax mailing. It was the consensus the Commission would wait for input from the Conservation Commission before advising the Selectmen on possible solutions.

Commission Vacancy: A replacement has not been appointed for Mr. Byerly. Mrs. Roberts will discuss this with Mr. Sears.

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

Mrs. Roberts adjourned the meeting at 9:10 p.m.

FILED SUBJECT TO APPROVAL

Respectfully submitted,

Janet M. Hill, Land Use Coordinator