

• August 19, 2006

Special Meeting

Saturday, August 19, 2006

10:00 a.m. Bryan Memorial Town Hall

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

MEMBER ABSENT: Mrs. Roberts

ALTERNATES PRESENT: Mr. Carey, Mr. Fowlkes

ALTERNATE ABSENT: Mrs. Braverman

STAFF PRESENT: Mrs. Hill, Mr. Morehouse

ALSO PRESENT: Mr. Werkhoven, Mr. Sears, Mr. Lyon, Press, Residents - see attached list

Mr. Werkhoven called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. and noted its purpose was to solicit public opinion about three aspects of the Depot study; parking, pedestrian access, and the river front loop property - both the idea of a greenway along the river and temporary use of the remainder of the property.

River Front Loop Property

Mr. Werkhoven read an introductory statement by the Planning Commission (right). Public comments included the following:

- Mr. Flood, Kinney Hill Road, thought the ideas presented to date were attractive and sensible. He asked what the unmarked areas on the Depot site plan indicated. Mr. Sears noted the white sections had no significance; there were no plans for these areas at this time.
- Mr. Sherr, Cook Street, noted affordable housing had been proposed as an appropriate use for the white areas on the site plan and asked how the Commission would balance this use and the other uses suggested in the opening statement. Mr. Werkhoven noted the agenda was to discuss only short term plans for this property. Mr. Rimsky explained any short term uses agreed upon would be flexible and would not impact any future long term uses. He noted there was a regulated wetlands setback area along the river where some long term uses such as affordable housing would most likely not be appropriate and so installation of a passive walkway along the river's edge would not impact

Washington Depot is so named because once a train ran through it, before that it was called Factory Hollow. All that has passed away but the one enduring constant that has shaped and defined the town more than any of this is the river that encircles it, The Shepaug. The Shepaug has been the source of life in this valley for as long as human occupation, which dates, back centuries before us and hopefully will continue centuries after us. It is also a powerful reminder that nature is a force to be respected and reckoned with, a force still scaring our living memories. Perhaps this is why over the years the river has been largely ignored, only noticed when it rises high in heavy rains, and only recently did we see the threat of the drying, sluggish stream it was reduced to. In either state it is important to note the human responsibility. The great devastation of the '55 flood was largely caused by badly designed human obstructions, and the near death of the river, similarly the effect of human intervention. These things too have passed and now it is time to celebrate this beautiful natural resource that embraces us.

The River loop around the old town garage site offers an incredible opportunity for the town to re-claim its river heritage. What the town may want to do with this entire property in the future must be carefully considered as time passes, but in the near future it could serve the community in many ways.

them.

- Mrs. Brinton, Titus Road, asked if the property was in the flood zone, saying if it were, there could be no housing there. Mr. Rimsky said it was in the flood plain as is most of the Depot. Mr. Charles noted 1) you can build in the flood zone according to the flood code and 2) the flood plain boundaries would be reevaluated in the future.
- Mrs. Smith noted that in the past there were many more housing units in the Depot, and thought that if in the future housing density would be increased, the river walk and other pocket parks would be vital to maintain the quality of life in the Depot. She thought the river walk was a great idea.
- Ms. Davidson, Woodbury Road, asked if the Town had a design for a municipal sewer system to accommodate an increase in density in the Depot. Mr. Charles said the Commission was aware this matter would have to be studied, but was not yet at that point.
- Mr. Lyon, Selectman, noted the Town still has a lot of bulk materials on the property and must find alternate locations for them before any short term uses of the property can be implemented.
- Mrs. Andersen, Blackville Road, asked why only temporary uses were being considered and whether the river walk would be temporary. She also asked when there would be a Town Meeting to approve both the Plan of Conservation and Development and the Depot study. Mr. Rimsky stated the trail would not affect future permanent development on the site and might be altered in the future, although it was being considered as a permanent greenway. He noted any work on municipal property would require approval at a Town Meeting. Mrs. Hill responded that the Commission had already held the required public hearing on the 2003 POCD, the Commission had already adopted it, and approval at a Town Meeting for either the Plan or the study was not required under the state statutes.
- Mrs. Boyer, Nichols Hill Road, said the undeveloped land downtown was an asset and should be cleaned up and kept green.
- Ms. Doran, River Road, complimented the Commission on its judicious and conservative approach.

Pedestrian Access

Mr. Werkhoven read the Commission's statement regarding pedestrian access (right).

- Ms. Stevens thought crossing Rt. 47 was scary and asked if a traffic light could be installed. There was a general groan from the audience. She then asked if there could be a light just for

Firstly, the greenways could be extended along the river to create a river walk. This part of the river is perhaps largely unknown to many, but it has truly magnificent scenery. A walking path with some picnic tables could be easily created above the riverbank without altering the natural beauty or effecting the river in any way. This path could then connect to the existing greenway completing it from Steep Rock to Bee Brook. The value of reclaiming this natural resource for the townspeople to enjoy cannot be overestimated.

Secondly, the main acreage of the site has many interim possibilities. The site will have to be cleared of debris and the disposition of remaining materials must still be determined but this is not beyond the scope of the town's capabilities. Once the area is prepared it could offer many recreational or environmental opportunities, such as playgrounds, community gardens, walking paths or simple open space meadows.

Some auxiliary parking areas already exist and these could easily be expanded and improved as part of the town parking system and for access to the area. Whatever long-term plans that this valuable property offers the town would not be impeded by this type of use and in the meantime the community could benefit from the practical and attractive uses the property affords.

The Planning Commission sees this as a sensible and immediate use for the property and looks forward to your thoughts and suggestions about these proposals.

A second topic we would like to cover today [tonight] is the question of improved pedestrian accessibility in the Depot.

At present, there are few formal sidewalks or pedestrian paths in the center of the Depot, making it difficult to walk around

the pedestrian crossing.

- Ms. Weeks did not think the installation of a sidewalk along Bee Brook Road or a traffic light on Rt. 47 were good ideas. She recommended traffic signs along Rt. 47 before entering the Depot from both directions to remind drivers to slow down. She thought the Depot should be kept the way it is.
- Mr. Morehouse, consultant from Wilbur Smith Associates, commented on the possibility of a traffic light in the Depot on Rt. 47. He noted the installation of traffic lights was state controlled based on vehicular and pedestrian volumes and said the Town would have to prove it met the threshold requirements to obtain one.
- Mr. Cornett, Nettleton Hollow Road, suggested a stop sign by the major crosswalk on Rt. 47. Mr. Morehouse stated it was less difficult to get the state to approve stop signs. He noted historically the state has given little consideration to the towns state roads pass through. He also noted that stop signs are usually not used to calm traffic.
- Mrs. Andersen suggested the following measures be considered to slow the traffic through the Depot; 1) introductory signs like the one telling motorists they are entering the village of New Preston and 2) smaller, quasi permanent speed signs that show how fast you are driving. She urged the Planning Commission to look at the speed sign near Weller's Bridge Road in Roxbury.
- Mrs. Wilber, Slaughterhouse Road, noted the traffic on Rt. 47 does not stop for the crosswalks, creating a dangerous situation. She urged flashing lights or some other measure to warn motorists. She also thought it was not necessary to have three crosswalks on Rt. 47 and that if more sidewalks were to be installed, they had to be maintained during the winter; the existing sidewalks aren't shoveled.
- Mr. Millington, Lower Church Hill Road, complained the parking situations in front of the Washington Supply and behind the Post Office when vehicles are trying to pull out onto River Road are accidents waiting to happen. He suggested the two Supply parking spaces at the corner of Rts. 47 and 109 be eliminated and that postal workers be required to park so that they don't block the sight lines.
- Mrs. Santoleri noted nothing about the Depot is currently pedestrian oriented, nothing says or gives you the feeling that you're here, and nothing is connected. She said the streets should be narrowed, street trees planted, and possibly street bumps installed to both slow the traffic and contribute to the visual sense of the town center. She suggested the goal should be to give the center a comfortable feel like a college campus.
- Mr. Hileman, River Road, agreed traffic should be slowed down. He supported the idea of a footbridge or bridges to connect River Road to the school property to make it safer for children to walk to school. He liked all of the ideas voiced so far.
- Ms. Doran said she agreed with Mrs. Santoleri's statement and the idea of a campus like set up.
- Mrs. Boyer was concerned that it would be very difficult to make the Depot pedestrian friendly because the roads involved were state highways. She suggested if good parking areas were available, people would be more likely to walk to rather than drive between their destinations.

town. Should there be more; where? Should those that have deteriorated or become overgrown be restored? Should benches be placed along the sides of some of the sidewalks?

Today there are four pedestrian crosswalks marked with white stripes on Route 47 and one on River Road. Should there be more crosswalks? Should the crosswalks be better delineated, by using a different paving surface for example?

Should there be a pedestrian bridge over the river, between the downtown area and the school grounds?

What other thoughts do you have to make the Depot more pedestrian friendly?

- Mrs. Ward thought that ugly speed signs were needed at both ends of town to attract motorists' attention and get them to slow down. She thought the Depot was already pedestrian friendly and did not think a traffic light or and footbridge was needed. She recommended the Town deal with what it has rather than make changes.
- Mr. Davidson noted one problem cited was that the Depot was not unified because it is divided by Rt. 47. He suggested a tastefully designed footbridge to span Rt. 47.
- Ms. Yurchak thought the campus idea was exciting. She said there was no place to walk with a carriage in the Depot and so a

walkway with benches would add a needed community feeling.

- Mr. Arturi, Shearer Road, said that in Greenwich there are always policemen at the busy intersections. He thought the Town should consider assigning constables to the crosswalk areas in the summer and on weekends.
- Mr. Rimsky noted that in North Hampton, Mass. traffic automatically stops at crosswalks, noted the difference in civic attitude, and said motorists must be educated.

Parking

Mr. Werhoven read the Planning Commission's statement regarding parking in the Depot Business District (right). He noted there had already been comments made about the dangerous parking at the Post Office and Washington Supply.

- Mrs. Wilber said she worked in the Depot and was complying with the request to park at the river loop property rather than in the municipal spaces. She pointed out the spaces behind the Town Hall are under utilized. She said commuters had to be informed they may not tie up municipal spaces all day. She suggested the problem behind the Post Office could be solved if concrete stops were placed so employees could not park within two to three feet of the road blocking the sight lines. Mr. Sears said he would check this out. She also noted the Primary School has a large lot that is usually only half full. She thought signs should be posted that long term parking is available at the school.

- Mr. Millington said people park too long in front of the stores and agreed the spaces behind the Town Hall should be used more.

- Mrs. Friedman, West Morris Road, suggested time limits be placed on the more "valuable" parking spaces and noted Litchfield strictly enforces its parking time limits.

- Ms. Doran suggested signs to direct motorists to the municipal parking spaces.

- Mrs. Andersen thought timed parking was a good idea, but said a Town ordinance would be required to implement it. She urged the Town to put in diagonal parking in the Plaza to improve sight lines. She

Throughout our public discussions and meetings with various Town boards and commissions the topic of parking in the Bryan Plaza and Titus Road areas was often brought up in many forms. While some viewpoints focused on a shortage of parking, others highlighted the flow of traffic through the Plaza area and safety concerns within the current parking area when either walking through or parking.

Turning to the Town residents, we pose the following questions:

1. Is there enough parking in the Depot area (specifically Bryan Plaza and the Titus Road shopping locations)? Is there a shortage at certain times of the day? Is the parking clearly identified?
2. Is there a concern with the flow of traffic through these areas? If so, what are some of these concerns? What could be done to address these concerns?
3. Could something be done to improve the safety of these parking areas? What are some suggestions?

again stated she thought the Planning Commission was just redoing what it had decided on five years ago.

A discussion regarding parking improvements in Bryan Plaza ensued. It was noted that by increasing the width of Bryan Plaza by ten feet, diagonal parking could be put in with a one way traffic loop. This would increase the number of available spaces and improve safety. Mr. Sears noted the business association had supported these improvements and if the public did, also, the Town could proceed with obtaining the \$25,000 it would cost for an engineered design for the Plaza improvements. Overwhelming support was voiced by those present.

- Mr. Brinton, South Street, asked if the one way traffic lanes would be wide enough for emergency vehicles. Mr. Sears said they would.
- Mrs. Andersen asked why the engineered plan was required. She thought diagonals should be painted on one side as soon as possible. She said the plan discussed was too complicated and maybe her simpler suggestion would be all that was necessary. Mr. Charles said the Planning Commission would research the matter based on the public response received.
- Mrs. Manning urged the Town to make the parking improvements as aesthetically pleasing as possible and not just put in a sea of blacktop. She suggested trees be planted in a center median.
- Mr. Arturi asked why a short term solution of diagonal parking on both sides and one way traffic through the Plaza could not be immediately considered.
- Mrs. Boyer thought that was a good idea, but asked how many spaces would be lost in the winter due to piles of snow. Mr. Sears said the snow could be taken elsewhere.
- An unidentified man remarked the above comments were examples of why the Town should hire a traffic engineer to make the plan work.
- Mr. Cornett, Nettleton Hollow Road, said the proposal was logical and the first steps being discussed now were positive solutions.
- Mr. Frank responded to Mrs. Andersen's earlier comments that the Commission was reinventing the wheel. He said process was important and that the Commission had promised there would be an opportunity for public input at each step of the process. Mrs. Andersen said she was concerned that the Commission had plans, but was not implementing them. She thought the parking situation was dangerous and required immediate attention. Mr. Rimsky noted the purpose of this meeting was to deal with those activities that the Town could reasonably expect to accomplish in the near future with enough foresight so they would not have to be redone when long term solutions were eventually selected.
- Mr. Millington noted his appreciation for the work the Planning Commission has done on the Town's behalf. He said he was appalled at last summer's reaction to the Depot study because it was the kind of long term thinking that was in the best interests of the Town and was what was needed for the Depot. There was a round of applause.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:10 a.m.

FILED SUBJECT TO APPROVAL

Respectfully submitted,

Janet M. Hill

Land Use Coordinator