

# September 13, 2012

## **Special Meeting**

7:00 p.m., 2nd Floor, Town Hall

**Members Present:** Ms. Roberts, Mr. Frank, Mr. Rimsky, Ms. Jahnke, Ms. Gager

**Members Absent:**

**Alternates Present:** Mr. Carey, Ms. Bishop Wrabel, Mr. Osborne

**Alternates Absent:**

**Staff Present:** Ms. Hill, Ms. White

**Also Present:** Mr. Harrall, Consultant, Mr. Looney, Consultant, Mr. Bedini, Mr. Talbot, Mr. Charles, Mr. Markert, Ms. Payne Mr. Parker, Mr. Picton, First Selectman Lyon, Ms. Keilty, Ms. Schulman, Mr. Ackerman, Mr. Jackson, Mr. Mustich, Mr. Millington, Mr. Flood, Mr. Walin, Ms. Torti, other business owners

Ms. Roberts called the Meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. and stated that Mr. Rimsky would start the conversation between the Commission and the business owners.

## **Plan of Conservation and Development:**

Mr. Rimsky stated that the POCD never included a chapter about business development and business activity in the Town and the Planning Commission would like to collect input from the business community and incorporate it in the revised POCD. He stated that he had previously interviewed some of the business owners in Town and received consistent responses from most of them. Mr. Rimsky stated that they expressed concern about parking and walkability of the Town. He noted that the statistics that were provided to the Planning Commission by Milone & MacBroom show that we are an aging community, we have fewer families with children and a large population of part time residents. On behalf of the Planning Commission and the Consultants from Milone & MacBroom, Mr. Rimsky asked the business owners to discuss what their concerns are and how they see business in the Town of Washington.

Ms. Keilty, owner of the Hickory Stick and President of the Washington Business Association stated that they appreciate this meeting. She stated that there are 110 businesses in the Washington Business Association and there are probably another 50 businesses that are potential members. Ms. Keilty stated that in the past year they have seen enormous growth and there is a broad range in the spectrum of businesses. She stated that the WBA formed an executive committee to identify the issues and needs of the businesses. Ms. Keilty stated that for them it is important to recognize that a healthy local business environment creates a healthy community by providing local options to residents as well as enhance the appeal to potential homebuyers. She stated that there are vacant retail and rental spaces in the community and it's not just a question of filling these empty spaces but filling them in a way that creates a climate that makes them interesting and sustainable. Ms. Keilty suggested that a temporary solution might involve decorating the spaces or encouraging seasonal pop up uses. She stated that the through change it is important to recognize the things that are valued and focus on how change can be influenced in ways that give cohesiveness and enhance these things that are valued. Ms. Keilty stated that there is a concern regarding the Route 202 corridor and how the expanding development of New Milford

and Bantam is going to influence this area. She recommended that cell service should be considered as a business enhancement as well as something for convenience and safety. Ms. Keilty stated that another ongoing concern is the abandoned gas station in Town and has received input from others that the Town ought to purchase it and set up a park or another recreational use. She stated that this may not be realistic but there are other possibilities and there is a need for both public and private partnerships that could offer more creative solutions and make things happen for the gas station property. Ms. Keilty stated that parking in the Villages is an issue for customers and employees in regards to safety, a welcoming environment for shoppers and pedestrian friendly access encourage people to linger, consider working here, living here and shopping here.

Ms. Keilty stated that some of the initiatives of the WBA are:

- 1) Buying Local; Working on the slogan "Think Local First." Ms. Keilty stated that shopping locally has become a national initiative and distributed a sheet titled *Think Local First: Here's what you just did!* by the Washington Business Association (on file in the Land Use Office).
- 2) Business Directory; Will be published in the next few weeks.

Ms. Keilty suggested that there needs to be the opportunity for collaboration between the Business Community and the Town in terms of the website and other materials that promote what the Community has to offer.

Ms. Keilty stated that as an overall consideration, one needs to consider what does "Think Local First" do for the community. She said that there have been two Community Days and this year's was well attended despite the rain. Ms. Keilty stated that "Think Local First" is not just a business initiative but also a vision of how the Community perceives itself and is perceived. She suggested that there could be a study group charged with evaluating and determining how to build on these resources and the ideas that are germinating.

Ms. Keilty reported that affordable housing, school enrollment and demographic issues are a concern to both the Town and the Business Community. She stated that there is a need to provide housing for young families and for people that want to downsize but stay in Town and continue to shop locally. In closing, Ms. Keilty invited the Planning Commission to use the WBA as a resource throughout the process of revising the POCD.

Mr. Talbot, Architect and also a member of the WBA read his letter addressed to the Planning Commission dated September 13, 2012 (on file in the Land Use Office). He suggested that it would be helpful to understand the process in which they are being asked to participate and thinking holistically while building consensus is important for the POCD to be successful. Mr. Talbot stated that planning "requires more than feedback from the stakeholders and requires an engagement methodology that reconciles the inevitable contrasting stakeholder viewpoints into a higher-order understanding that all stakeholders can experience, share, and work from together" and he asked, as a stakeholder, "what is the methodology that Milone & MacBroom are using to create this understanding – an understanding of what is powerful, compelling, and fundamentally true about our town?" He recommended that building consensus about how a municipality works and how to impact it to benefit its residents. Mr. Talbot requested that the Planners inform them as to how the business communities "participation will result in, as they have promised, a "living" document that we all understand and can build together."

Mr. Rimsky noted that the Planning Commission has discussed consensus building and the

importance of getting the community behind this POCD.

Mr. Harrall responded that meetings such as this allow them to collect information and come up with questions and that they would be working with the Planning Commission and Ms. Hill, Land Use Administrator, in order to guide them to the appropriate people to speak with. He acknowledged the WBA for its hard work and hopes that they would be able to work together during this revision process.

Mr. Talbot felt that his question was not answered and asked the Planners to discuss what the methodology is and how they are approaching this revision.

Mr. Harrall responded that how they are approaching this revision, in terms of their methodology, is to determine with the Planning Commission what is uniquely the Town of Washington and that they do not have a standard methodology. He noted that they have been impressed with the attendance and face-to-face participation of the special meetings that have been held thus far. Mr. Harrall said that meetings such as this provide them the ability to follow up and that they would also be setting up office hours in the Town Hall to meet with people that may not feel comfortable discussing their thoughts and expressing their ideas at these meetings or are unable to attend the meetings. He stated that their methodology evolves as more information is gathered through the revision process.

Mr. Talbot feels that there is a concern regarding scheduling.

Mr. Mustich asked Mr. Harrall what other towns their firm has done this for that are similar to the Town of Washington.

Mr. Harrall responded that they have worked on about 25-30 plans in the State of Connecticut and that they approach every assignment uniquely. He stated that they intend to prepare topical reports in draft form, have the Planning Commission provide feedback, ask questions etc and the end product would be put on the website and be discussed with Planning and other public meetings and the POCD would be based upon these "building blocks." Mr. Harrall noted that the kick off meeting with the Town and this meeting are mostly for information collecting and determining the tenor of things.

Mr. Rimsky stated that we have a town that has hamlets and the Planning Commission and Consultants plan to schedule meetings with the communities of Marbledale and New Preston because the revised plan should address issues and concerns of these areas and not just the Depot.

Mr. Talbot noted that Woodville is a fraction of the size it was.

Mr. Mustich stated that they are not called hamlets and if one goes to the WBA website they would find that these areas are called the 5 villages of Washington

Mr. Rimsky stated that it is important that these villages are included in the revision of the POCD.

Mr. Jackson said that it strikes him that the most significant problem is the declining children population in the schools which signifies that the Town is losing young families and if the Town does not address this problem economic development won't need to be addressed. He asked if a base economic study has been done for the next five years for the Town of Washington. Mr.

Jackson stated that the result, if nothing were done, would be that the Town is going to age and as a result have a determinable end. He suggested that an agreement amongst ourselves is needed as to what the problem is that we want to address.

Mr. Rimsky confirmed that according to the statistics, the Town of Washington is aging, as is the entire State of Connecticut. He noted that there is a shift from full time residency to part time residency and these issues need to be addressed and realistic decisions need to be made.

Mr. Millington suggested that the Old Town Garage site be made into a public park and that it would cost the Town very little. He stated that we all love the businesses that are here but we do not have enough, the ones we have are barely getting by or going out of business and there is a lack of cohesiveness. Mr. Millington believes that having a park at the Old Town Garage site would encourage people to linger. He suggested that the Town should consider attracting high tech industry and that a team should promote the town to these types of businesses. Mr. Millington stated that he has talked to the owner of a high tech business in Town that employs ten people. He said that housing is very important to attract young families. Mr. Millington suggested a cultural center for the Town due to the large amount of residents that are involved in the arts.

Mr. Mustich stated that the Town is aging and maybe it should lift the moratorium on condominiums. He feels that there is no need to fear not having young families and that older communities can be successful. Mr. Mustich stated that if there weren't volunteers then the residents would just have to pay for emergency services.

Mr. Rimsky responded that planning for an aging community is going to be part of the revision process and a community is an organic thing and many people have an idea or vision of what they want their community to be. He feels that many people envision the villages having children and elderly people and the loss of either would be alarming and the Town is not without ways to ameliorate these issues. He feels that if a difference is made for twelve people out of a thousand then it is worth it.

Mr. Mustich suggested that people in Town might only want young families because they would most likely volunteer.

Mr. Rimsky responded that that is not the reason and most people in Town would like a well-rounded community.

Mr. Jackson noted that the volunteer fire department has the greatest amount of young people as active members that he has ever seen and half of them do not live in Town. He asked what are these young men doing here, why are they with this fire company? Mr. Jackson suggested that this is something that could be looked at in regards to the housing issue. He asked how could we get these people to live here? Mr. Jackson feels that it is necessary to do an analysis of the fundamental economic problem that we face, what it means, forecast it, and then build a plan which would be taken to the villages "and say what do you want to do about this?" He asked, "What are the things we are going to target?"

Mr. Rimsky noted Education is an industry in Town and a large amount of the workers in that industry do not and cannot afford to live in Town. He stated that this is not the best way to manage an industry in the community and we are trying to find ways to make that change.

Mr. Rimsky asked the business owners how they feel about the geographic situation with the villages and how they feel the Town could make the totality of the Washington commercial effort a unified one.

Mr. Flood asked how well identified and organized the villages are and what questions do they have?

Mr. Rimsky responded that they would get a better feel for the villages needs when they have their meetings with them but this would be a total commercial effort for the whole of the businesses in Washington.

Mr. Ackerman, owner of The Pantry, stated that he has seen a great advancement in the cohesiveness of the villages and hopes the process will continue and it has accelerated since he has been here. He asked if there is a website that they would be able to follow the progress of the POCD revision.

Mr. Looney responded that the Town website has a link.

Mr. Ackerman suggested that it would be helpful to see how other communities have gone through this process.

Mr. Talbot said that the aging population would be an opportunity for businesses that serve the aging community and would bring employment opportunities for young people. He stated that these people would have families and need housing.

Mr. Rimsky asked Ms. Schulman how she felt about being able to conduct business in Marbledale where she had some fairly good parking and now her business is in New Preston where parking tends to be an issue.

Ms. Schulman stated that she had a business in Marbledale and has moved it to New Preston. She said that she strongly supported efforts to make Marbledale a viable shopping area but she needed to go to an area where people are walking around because it is better for business and she has been able to employ more people.

Mr. Rimsky talked briefly about Marbledale and managing Route 202 from a commercial and Town point of view.

Mr. Flood stated that the challenge is to get people that are driving down 202 to make a left and follow Route 47 into the Depot.

Mr. Picton stated that it is important to have walkable town centers with a concentration of population within a convenient walking distance that supports businesses and allows people to enjoy the Town. He suggested that the Planners and the Planning Commission look at the LEED for Neighborhood Development Guidelines that includes comprehensive guidelines to create walkable, viable town centers in a way that the outskirts and the rural areas of the Town could remain open or less developed.

Mr. Parker asked if the goal of the Consultants and the Planning Commission is to take a model like the LEED plan and find out the unique characteristics of the Town of Washington, inventory them and figure how to bridge this gap between what we have today and our natural resources so

the Town could converge on an action plan that works for sustainability.

Mr. Rimsky stated that at the moment the Commission and Consultants are trying to identify the issues and the things that need to be targeted in a specific way.

Mr. Parker asked if the Town has, by village, the total revenues, information on trending and seasonality, “do we know fully what this Town is today and what it has been historically so that we can say: here are the assets of the Town. Where is it going to go...and what are the solutions to this inventory?” He asked if this inventory is available for the public to see.

Mr. Rimsky responded that they are beginning to develop that inventory with the Demographic report done by Milone & MacBroom.

Mr. Parker asked if it is known how many people are employed in this Town and in which sectors of business. He asked if we are “striving to get this information so we can build on it and understand the trends so that we encourage those businesses that are growing and if education is a big driver in this Town how people are employed today versus five years ago?”

Mr. Harrall responded that they started this process in June and are in the early data gathering stages and will answer the questions that are coming up at these meetings. He stated that this meeting has been worthwhile because he has 15 items from this meeting of things that they are going to look into. Mr. Harrall said that they would be dealing with the numbers in terms of jobs and will have the information to analyze and discuss in the community. He noted that no two communities are alike so there are no models that would fit for the Town of Washington. Mr. Harrall stated that they would look into the LEED concept but most likely they will find that there are recommendations that do not make sense for the Town of Washington because of the uniqueness of the community. He discussed the diversity of the towns in Connecticut.

Mr. Parker asked at what point in the process would questions be answered.

Mr. Harrall responded that in their agreement with the Town, in the initial stages they would consult with the Commission as to how they would execute community participation/outreach. He stated that they are in the process of doing that right now and in the agreement, Milone & MacBroom stated that they would not come in with a standard approach and would be tailoring the process to make sense for the Town of Washington.

Mr. Parker asked, “What are the questions that the Consultants need answered in order for them to do their work.”

Mr. Harrall responded that he does not have a standard list of questions and has been in this business for forty years and has experience with every type of community and working with the Planning Commission they will come up with a list of crucial questions that are specific to the Town of Washington. He stated that they would identify the opportunities based on the facts and compare them to the community that is being envisioned. Mr. Harrall noted that this is not a numbers driven process.

Mr. Rimsky discussed the purpose of this meeting. He stated that the Planning Commission and the Consultants want to hear about the business communities concerns so they could answer their questions and identify and address core issues.

Ms. Gager stated that about eighteen months ago the Planning Commission reviewed the current POCD and formed a subcommittee made up of members from other commissions/committees in Town to have a dialogue and discussion to review the 2003 POCD and see what was still valid, still important and that was the platform put before the consultants to start the discussions.

Ms. Owles stated that she had a question about other towns that could be models and was thinking of places like Granby to be a comparable model.

Mr. Harrall responded that Granby has the Granby airport and the proximity for employment in the Hartford area and the Town of Washington does not. He stated that there are no cookie cutter plans. Mr. Harrall noted that the T.O.W. is comprised of 5 villages that have developed differently over the years and it is his opinion that each village will require a different strategy related to their uniqueness.

Mr. Markert stated that it is clear there are a lot of issues to address and the success of a plan would be based on how it is implemented. He suggested that priorities should be set and pursued on an ongoing basis. Mr. Markert stated that he did not know if part of the POCD would have the Planning Commission continue to be involved in a very proactive and communicative way with the Town. He asked the Consultants, "What characterizes the success of a Town in implementing a plan?" Mr. Markert stated that he has researched other towns and there are some very critical simple things that are absent in the T.O.W.

Mr. Harrall responded that the first thing is that the town needs to decide whether it is willing to make a real financial investment. He said that there has been a lot of discussion about economic development and promoting the town and asked if this town is prepared to pay and hire somebody for that job or is it going to continue to rely on volunteers. Mr. Harrall stated that the second question the Town needs to answer is "What is the relationship between the Planning Commission and the regulatory commissions, specifically the Zoning Commission?" He noted that it would be difficult if the Zoning Commission were not on board with the POCD. Mr. Harrall stated that some towns have a town planner if their budget could carry that expense. He said that the political will is another factor that would determine how successful the plan is implemented and there must be the commitment of the Town.

Mr. Rimsky emphasized the importance of the commitment of the people in town.

Mr. Markert asked, "Isn't it possible that the regulatory environment isn't conducive to this and should we be looking at our 'marching orders' that we give to the various commissions?" He noted that some of the surrounding towns have revamped their regulations to redefine how they would like to see the town in the future and as a result there is a much more involved set of committees and commissions.

Mr. Rimsky responded that this is one of the reasons they would like to meet with Zoning.

Ms. Torge stated that she attended a meeting on Monday night to hear about the plan that the Town has to redo the sidewalk in front of the market and it seems like it is a major project that will change the character of the area. She stated that she does not understand the sequence of events of why this is being done at this point.

Ms. Gager responded that she is on the Shade Tree Committee and this project came out of the

Depot Study that was done a number of years ago. She stated that this project has been talked about for some time it was decided that they would move forward because of safety purposes dealing with the trees and the sidewalk itself.

Ms. Torge stated that the plan to remove the trees and replace them with other landscape is going to change the character of the community and "it seems backwards" to do something so dramatic before the Town has all of this information.

Ms. Gager responded that this was an idea that came forth as a result of the Depot Study that the Planning Commission got behind and thought that they could move forward and do something on a smaller scale, enhancing the sidewalks in that area

Ms. Roberts stated that that she has heard that people are upset that the trees are coming down and they do not realize that they should not have been planted there in the first place and though they look healthy at the moment they are not going to stay healthy.

Mr. Talbot stated that he agreed with Ms. Torge. He suggested that it might be helpful to hear from the Consultants what they have taken away from this meeting.

Mr. Charles noted that when the parents drop their kids off in the Depot they would shop and it had a positive impact on the business community. When the POCD was updated in 2003, he said they found that approximately 650 people come to the T.O.W. to work and what strikes him is that there are a huge number of people that come here everyday but the housing is missing. Mr. Charles observed that when we think of culture we think of painting, drawing and Dance Theater but culture is also something like Averill Farm and we have 30% of the Town that is set aside for open space and have made land preservation one of our goals and values and he doesn't think we make enough of it.

Mr. Harrall read the list of items that he would like into more in depth as a result of what he has heard from tonight's meeting:

- 1) Meet with the President of the WBA and discuss the possibility of using the membership as a vehicle for surveying
- 2) Quality of life was mentioned – meet with owners of the pharmacy
- 3) Cell phone service
- 4) Gas station site – more information re: Status
- 5) School enrollment – meet with representatives of Region 12
- 6) Depot Study – wants to know the issues
- 7) Agriculture – what exists, what is in store for the future
- 8) High Tech Business – meet with owner
- 9) Cultural Center – take advantage of residents, what has been done in the past
- 10) Tax Situation – compare with other towns in the region, attracting businesses to the area
- 11) Economic Forecasting - number of people working in Town
- 12) Education as an Industry – where do these people live? Quantify educational related jobs
- 13) Aging Population – providing opportunities, elderly care workers is lower paid jobs in the State
- 14) Marbledale, NewPreston – traffic, statistics
- 15) LEED – look at and see what make sense for T.O.W
- 16) Relationship with Zoning and Planning



Mr. Charles asked if there is a reason why the Zoning Commission couldn't be told that they have to follow the POCD.

Mr. Harrall responded that there have been lawsuits between the commissions when the POCD was not followed and referrals are not consistently requested.

Mr. Talbot wanted to make sure that the issue of Flood Plains in the business districts was considered and as well as the issue of septic systems because they are hindrances to expanding business.

Mr. Charles stated that the Town talked about having a Flood Plain Study and hydraulic analysis done for the Depot area and he believes that this may almost be done.

Mr. Carey stated that the Selectmen are in the last steps of defining the Flood Plain and the Consultants have been shown all the information to this date.

Mr. Charles pointed out that "what we thought should be done in the Depot is, at the very least, we should do an analysis of the soils to see what we could do within the limitations of septic systems."

Mr. Walin asked if there would be an electronic means to communicate their ideas.

Mr. Looney stated that there is a link on the website to the Planning email account.

Mr. Frank suggested that the business owners forward any suggestions no matter how small.

Mr. Charles suggested that Ms. Keilty encourage all the members of the WBA to go on line and read the minutes and inform them that a recording of the meeting is available in the Land Use Office.

The Planning Commission thanked the business owners for attending.

Ms. Roberts adjourned the meeting at 9:15 pm.

FILED SUBJECT TO APPROVAL

Respectfully submitted,

Shelley White, Land Use Clerk