

March 1, 2011

7:30 p.m. Land Use Meeting Room

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mrs. Roberts, Mr. Frank, Mrs. Jahnke, Mr. Rimsky

MEMBER ABSENT: Ms. Gager

ALTERNATES PRESENT: Mrs. Braverman, Mr. Carey

STAFF PRESENT: Mrs. Hill

ALSO PRESENT: Mr. Bedini, Mr. Hileman, Mr. Solley

Mrs. Roberts called the Meeting to order at 7:31 p.m. and seated Members Roberts, Frank, Jahnke, and Rimsky and Alternate Braverman for Ms. Gager.

Consideration of the Minutes

MOTION:

To accept the 1/4/11 Regular Meeting minutes as written.

By Mr. Frank, seconded by Mrs. Roberts, and passed 5-0.

MOTION:

To include subsequent business not already posted on the agenda:

1) Referral from the IWC re: shoreline protection policies and 2) update on floodplain mapping.

By Mrs. Roberts, seconded by Mrs. Braverman, and passed 5-0.

Other Business

Referral from Inland Wetlands Commission/Shoreline Protection Policies:

The draft document addressing shoreline protection policies was circulated. The commissioners will review it and discuss it at the next meeting.

Birch Hill Run Subdivision/Acceptance of Town Road:

The 1991 subdivision map by Nexus Engineering, 4 sheets, was reviewed. The location of the property was noted and Mr. Solley, Selectman, pointed out the Phase I section of road that was actually completed. Ordinance 4.13 on the acceptance of roads by the Town and the 1991 Planning Commission minutes, which indicated both the applicant and the Commission expected the road would be accepted as a Town road, were referred to. Mr. Solley explained that although residents on Birch Hill Run want the road to be accepted by the Town, the current subdivision owner does not because he fears it could then be used for access to a potential future subdivision on adjoining property. Mr. Solley noted that Washington does not allow private roads and that more than half of the lots on the portion of completed road have been developed. In preparation for a vote at a Town Meeting to accept Birch Hill Run as a Town road, he asked the Commission for a letter of support. A lengthy discussion followed regarding why hadn't the road been accepted already and what would happen if it was voted down at the Town Meeting. Mr. Solley stated the road had been built to the required standards of The Town Road Specifications Ordinance, currently needed to be chip sealed, but otherwise was in good condition. It was the consensus of the commissioners that the Commission could not have approved the subdivision in 1991 if it had not included a Town road. Mr. Rimsky thought it would set a bad precedent if this matter was not dealt with appropriately. The commissioners agreed that when the Board of Selectmen has scheduled a Town Meeting for a vote to accept Birch Hill Run as a Town road, it will send a letter of

support.

Update/Referral from Board of Selectmen/Section 8-24/Municipal Improvement/Proposed Cell Tower:
Mr. Solley said there had been little progress since the last meeting. Mr. Frank noted that the Commission wanted to review the final draft of the proposed lease before commenting on the tower.

Update/Floodplain Mapping:

Mr. Solley advised the commissioners that the 2 ft. contour map was finished and available for review in the Selectmen's Office. The contours will be compared with those on the current FEMA maps and if there are significant differences, FEMA will be challenged. Mr. Carey noted the 2 ft. contour map includes a lot of detail and could be used in connection with other existing maps to show all of the Depot from Cook Street to the firehouse on one A2 map. He also noted that later in the spring when there is no more flooding, the surveyor would locate the riparian edges on the map. All agreed that accurate maps were needed in order to discuss future plans for the Depot.

Report on 1/28/11 the Connecticut Main Street Center's Workshop on Downtown Revitalization (and POCD):

Mrs. Jahnke, Ms. Gager, and Mrs. Hill had attended the day long workshop. Mrs. Jahnke noted that many Ct. towns have problems similar to Washington's and have come up with innovative solutions. Mrs. Hill reported her impressions of the economic development study the NW Collaborative had done for the towns in the NW corner. She said the study had included issues such as demographics, retail analysis, retail and commercial surveys, village center analysis, review of how each town related to the whole NW corner, carbon footprints, gateways, regional strategy councils, town economic leadership councils, marketing and promotion, and broadening the definition of transit oriented development to include feet and bikes. She thought there was much to consider when drafting a chapter on economic development for the POCD, noted no one on the commission had a background in economic development, and so strongly recommended that the Commission hire a consultant to guide this work. The discussion progressed to the Plan of Conservation and Development.

Plan of Conservation and Development/Subcommittee Report, Budget, Etc.

Mr. Rimsky said there were economic problems unique to Washington due to the configuration of its village centers and their disparate interests and agreed the Commission was limited in its ability to work on solutions due to its lack of economic knowledge. He suggested there may be people in the community with the expertise to help and said the Commission should ask for volunteers. He also thought it would be a good idea if the business community had a vested interest in the Plan's recommendations for economic solutions. Mr. Frank suggested the Planning Commission join the NW Collaborative so it could draw upon its resources. Mr. Carey questioned whether economic development was under the charge of the Commission and also noted that some components of the current Plan were outdated. He said that education was the major source of employment in Town and so the Plan should be supportive of it.

Mrs. Braverman began a summary of the subcommittee committee meeting and noted the minutes were posted on the website. Mr. Hileman, chairman of the Housing Commission, and Mr. Bedini, Board of Education, had attended and had spoken at length regarding housing and education issues. (See 2/17/11 minutes for specific discussion.) She said Mr. Hileman had suggested that new residential zones be established surrounding the existing village centers. He said these zones would allow denser development, which would bring down housing costs and strengthen the centers.

There was a discussion about specific educational issues. Mr. Bedini said a major problem was how to educate the public about regional school district problems. He cited specific examples such as declining enrollment, cost per student, enormous cost of operating the district, terrible disrepair of the facilities,

etc. The difficulty of trying to get the three towns in the district to work together to tackle problems was noted. He also said that it was a misconception that because all three towns must agree, the regional plan could not be changed. He said he had spoken with state senators who said the state laws can be revised. Mrs. Roberts asked how he thought the Planning Commission could help. Mr. Bedini thought the Commission should understand that the school buildings are "in crisis" and that there is now a "disconnect" between the school system and Town government.

Mrs. Hill referred back to the broader issue of updating the Plan. First she noted the poor public reception of the 2005 charrette and the Depot Study report as it was thought it had gone too far and that it encouraged the development of the Depot. Then she noted her surprise when she had heard at the subcommittee meeting comments that the POCD had not gone far enough and did not address all of the issues that it should have, and that the Commission had not worked hard enough to implement the recommendations it did make. She thought one of the first things the Commission should do when updating the Plan was to decide whether it would deal with what now exists in Town and make recommendations based on current trends or whether it would try to direct policies and make recommendations that would help shape the future.

Mr. Rimsky thought it was important to take a pragmatic approach and to advise the public of the ongoing problems with housing, demographics, education, and the economy in Town. Mrs. Braverman thought the Commission should be proactive. Mr. Carey said a strong document containing both the facts and the major problems was needed. Mr. Frank said the Plan should describe current conditions, but look forward and make recommendations about what should be done. He said the Commission must collect, understand, and evaluate all relevant information before making recommendations in the Plan.

Mr. Rimsky noted that he had spoken with several business owners who want the Town to focus more on its relationship and communication with the business community. He said the Town is not paying attention to its economic component, which in turn, impacts all who live here.

Mr. Hileman stated that all of the issues discussed tonight were interconnected; the Commission could not just deal with one in isolation. He said that Region 12 was the Town's second largest employer and so the Town must plan for its future. He said he knew education was not traditionally addressed in the Plan, but said these were not traditional times. He thought the upcoming Plan was more important than the previous Plans of the last 30 years.

Mr. Hileman addressed the issue of housing. He noted that how the Commission deals with it must change because there is no longer any state funding available. He urged the Commission to address the housing problem, not the "affordable" housing problem, in Town since there are opportunities for families earning less than \$60,000 per year, but none for families earning between \$60,000 and \$150,000. He said this was the most serious problem as the Town's declining population impacts the others and the quality of life. He suggested the Planning Commission could help start to restore the balance by presenting a Plan that could guide the Town forward.

Mr. Hileman complained that 76 pages of the 2003 Plan had addressed open space/rural character issues, while only 9 pages addressed people. He thought people were the most important component of the Town's character, not land preservation.

Mr. Frank noted that the POCD is authorized by state statute and he did not know whether towns were authorized to include topics such as education.

Mr. Bedini pointed out that in his experience in other Ct. towns planning commissions wielded more "power" than the other commissions. He wondered why the Washington Planning Commission could not

be more influential in establishing the Town's goals and implementing regulations to achieve them. He suggested the town commissions and Board of Selectmen should work together under the direction of the Planning Commission.

Mr. Rimsky responded that the Town is like a multi million dollar business and so the Commission should try to think more like a corporation. He noted that Planning does express its opinion at public hearings, but was often frustrated when it puts forth sound ideas that are not acted upon.

Mrs. Roberts thought Planning was obliged to state where the Commission thinks the Town should be heading. She said Planning was willing to take on this responsibility.

Mr. Hileman thought the Town was equipped to deal with its problems because so many talented people live here. He said once the Town's current state of affairs was evaluated, the people could all work together to achieve the Town's goals. Mrs. Roberts agreed that more focus is needed to bring attention to the issues and to speed up the process of working on solutions. Mr. Bedini stated that both a strategic plan and an implementation plan were needed.

Reporting again on the subcommittee meeting, Mrs. Braverman said the Zoning Commission wants the Board of Selectmen to take a proactive role and make recommendations for acceptable cell tower locations, but the Board was not willing to do so. She noted a second subcommittee meeting will be held on March 23.

Referral from the Zoning Commission/Revision of Zoning Regulations Re: Youth Camps:

Mr. Frank reported that the Zoning Commission had consulted with its attorney who advised that it could either proceed with the proposal to define youth camp and allow it by Special Permit in the R-1 District or take a broader approach to revise the Regulations to allow the expansion of grandfathered non conforming uses by Special Permit. The Zoning Commission thought the broader approach had merit because it was not specific to one site and it will continue to discuss it at its next meeting. Mr. Frank noted that recently the Planning Commission had voted three times against revisions to the Zoning Regulations that had been proposed by the Zoning Commission. He thought the two commissions should work more closely together and suggested the Planning Commission be part of the revision process before proposed language is finalized so that it is not put in the position of having to take an adversarial position against Zoning. Mr. Rimsky thought the two commissions might meet together once a month. Mrs. Roberts asked Mr. Frank to discuss this with Mr. Owen, Zoning chairman, before the next meeting.

Revision of the Subdivision Regulations:

Mrs. Hill asked the commissioners to review the latest draft for the next meeting and recommended this work be completed before work begins in earnest on the update of the POCD.

MOTION: To adjourn the Meeting. By Mr. Rimsky.

Mrs. Roberts adjourned the meeting at 9:45 p.m.

FILED SUBJECT TO APPROVAL

Respectfully submitted,
Janet M. Hill
Land Use Coordinator