

October 15, 2002

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mrs. Averill, Mr. Bender, Mr. Buck, Mr. Byerly, Mr. Charles

ALTERNATES PRESENT: Mr. Rimsky, Mrs. Roberts, Mr. Sabin

STAFF PRESENT: Mr. Chalder, Mrs. Hill, Mrs. Luckey

ALSO PRESENT: Mr. Boling, Mrs. Friedman, Mr. Martin, Mrs. Payne

Mr. Bender called the Special Meeting to order at 4:25 p.m. and seated Members Averill, Bender, Buck, and Charles and Alternate Roberts for Mr. Byerly. Mr. Chalder apologized for arriving late.

Mr. Chalder hoped to briefly cover all the conceptual issues in Book 5 and then return to discuss them in greater detail at a later date. Community structure, residential development, and village business development were the topics to be discussed.

Community Structure: Mr. Chalder described this as the overall defining element of the Plan. He asked the Commissioners to review the map on page 3 to make sure he had included/located all the relevant areas. It was the consensus he had done so. The following issues were addressed in the discussion of this topic:

- Mr. Sabin pointed out that Marbledale should be listed in the mixed use village category rather than as a focal point. Mr. Chalder explained mixed use in this case was the broader concept of mixed uses within a zoning district rather than within the same building. Mr. Sabin also maintained, and Mr. Bender agreed, that there are two Marbledales, the mixed use village and the strip along Rt. 202 to the north.
- Mixed use within buildings in commercial districts, commercial on the ground floor with dwelling units above, was generally supported because it would 1) soften the impact of commercial areas, 2) preserve the character of Town, and 3) keep the Town centers alive. Mr. Chalder also noted this type of mixed use would 1) enhance the existing village areas, 2) provide affordable housing, and 3) help to preserve existing historic structures.
- Mrs. Roberts said she supported the concept of village centers within the Town, citing The Green as an example. She recommended the Plan include circles of village use and that population figures and commercial needs for these centers be projected for at least 10 years.
- Mr. Martin thought emphasis should be kept on the Marbledale Business District. Although he said he might favor adding some uses to the list of those permitted in the Woodville area, he did not want efforts to make Marbledale a viable business center to be diluted by expansion of the Woodville District at this time.
- Mr. Charles thought the Marbledale District should be expanded to include Mygatt, Scofield Hill, and Wheaton Roads. If expanded in this way, he envisioned more of a village center and less of a strip. He said expansion to make this into a center would make the District more accessible to pedestrians and could work to slow down traffic on Rt. 202. Mr. Rimsky and Mr. Sabin strongly agreed. Mr. Sabin suggested the above recommended expansion area could be a transition zone where more imaginative development including all types of housing and a river park/greenway could be located. All agreed places to live and walk were important components of a village center. Mr. Martin noted the Zoning Commission also had some advocates for expanding the Marbledale Business District and said that Commission had viewed its recent revisions and improvements to the regulations governing that District as the first stage in a series of improvements for Marbledale.

Mr. Chalder agreed a transition zone where more dynamic development was permitted as it got closer to Rt. 202 could be viable for Marbledale. Mr. Bender thought this might be accomplished through the Special Permit process. Mr. Martin cautioned that the Zoning Commission has a strong loyalty to residential property owners. Mr. Rimsky agreed, but noted Wheaton Road, for example, where a church and gallery are already located, could support mixed use properties without a major change in its character. Mr. Chalder said he would work on a conceptual plan with specific performance goals for this area. Again, the Commissioners stressed that the Marbledale center would have to be redesigned to get rid of the through road concept by creating an intense sense of center with easy pedestrian access. Mr. Boling thought narrower roads with trees planted along side would also help to slow traffic. Mr. Chalder said in recent years the DOT has been drafting more sensitive designs to retain the local character of state roads, and he hoped the state would be cooperative in this case. Mrs. Roberts noted Lyme, New Hampshire was a good example of a town that incorporated pedestrian access in its design and said she would give Mr. Chalder information on this subject.

- Mr. Charles asked how the Commission would know if it was allowing for adequate density in the village centers so that open space could be preserved elsewhere. He noted that to take development pressure off outlying lands and to encourage village centers, density would have to be considered differently than it is now. Mr. Chalder thought this could be accomplished under soil based zoning with few changes needed.

Housing and Residential Development: Mr. Chalder noted 97% of the existing housing in Washington is single family dwellings and said the Town has excellent regulations in place to deal with the relationship of development and natural resources. He also noted from his conversations with residents that Washington has a sincere desire for population diversity. The following topics were discussed:

Housing Diversity:

- Mr. Rimsky asked what would motivate developers to construct starter homes in Washington. Mr. Charles said these would be built if profitable and they would not be profitable unless greater density was permitted or limited equity parcels were available. Mr. Rimsky thought the average resident would prefer a starter home to an affordable condo or apartment. He asked if the Town could establish a policy to encourage starter homes.
- Mr. Chalder noted under the affordable housing appeals section of the state statutes a developer could apply for greater density than permitted under soil based zoning and the burden of proof would be on the Town to show why this could not be done.
- Options for financing affordable housing were discussed; for profit developers, non profit developers, public and private sector partnerships, and the Town as the developer. Most favored using a partnership of the Town and a non profit developer. In general Commissioners feared affordable housing projects by for profit developers could be out of scale with the Town and not in keeping with rural character. Mr. Chalder pointed out, however, that given land costs and the cost of construction per square foot it was difficult for small scale developers to make a profit. Mr. Charles thought the Town should draft a plan and take the responsibility for providing affordable housing.
- Mr. Chalder pointed out land acquisition would be a major issue for the Town. He said the greater number of appropriate parcels for affordable housing the Town owned, the more control it would have over development and noted Farmington, for example, obtains lots that have been foreclosed on. Mr. Bender asked if the Town currently held any parcels that could be used for limited equity

housing. He noted the regional school sits on more land than it needs and asked if any school property could be used. Mrs. Luckey stated the Town did not own many unimproved lots. Mr. Charles suggested that in the future when the Town accepts open space it should set aside 5% of appropriate parcels for cluster housing in all price ranges. It was noted land costs would be the key factor in whether or not a project would be affordable.

- A new law approved by the Massachusetts legislature was discussed. This would permit the subdivision of minimum sized lots with detached accessory apartments in Nantucket. The apartment would become the primary structure on the new lot and would provide affordable housing opportunities for homeowners. It was noted this approach would encourage the continued mix of many housing price ranges throughout the whole community and requires a deed restriction re: affordability. Mr. Martin was concerned this could be used to circumvent the density policies in the Town's comprehensive plan. Mr. Bender noted regardless of lot size, in these cases the accessory apartments were already served by separate septic systems. Mr. Chalder noted Massachusetts had OK'd the increase in density in exchange for perpetual affordable housing units. Mrs. Friedman asked who would monitor the units to make sure they remained affordable. Mr. Chalder said this would be overseen by a local organization.
- Mr. Sabin noted he continues to meet people in Town who do not want any affordable housing. Mr. Rimsky thought this was a position against rental units, but that ownership opportunities by way of starter homes would be more widely accepted because they would fit in more with the character of the community and would give the owners a sense of New England pride. He thought apartments and condos were more appropriate units for the elderly because they required less upkeep. He agreed with Mr. Charles that a portion of appropriate open space parcels could be used for affordable housing and thought if the Town asked for it, there would be many generous residents who would donate land for affordable housing.
- Limited equity housing was discussed. Mrs. Roberts pointed out the White Memorial Foundation has successfully managed a limited equity housing program.
- Mr. Bender asked who the lead organization for affordable housing should be. Mrs. Luckey noted some towns have housing authorities. Mr. Bender thought the addition of a housing department would result in a large increase in the Town budget. He asked Mr. Chalder to research the possibility of a non profit management company to handle this.
- Mr. Chalder noted affordable housing is permitted by Special Permit under Section 13.15 of the Zoning Regulations for Town of Washington and non profit sponsored housing only.
- Mr. Rimsky recommended the old Town Garage site on Titus Road be used for clustering affordable single family units in keeping with the character of the area and under Town guidance.
- Mr. Chalder advised the Commission to think about whether it favored scattering several kinds of affordable units throughout Town or whether it wanted these units clustered in specific areas. It was agreed the Town should define as many appropriate strategies as possible to maximize its chances for success. It was thought single family residences could be scattered throughout Town and the optimum location for clusters of multifamily units would be within walking distance of the village centers. Mr. Chalder suggested another option would be for the Planning Commission to require a percentage of affordable housing units in each subdivision approved.

At the next meeting discussion will continue from page 10 of Booklet #5. In the meantime, Mr. Bender asked the Commissioners to write down their thoughts on development issues and to send them to Mr.

Chalder.

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

Mr. Bender adjourned the meeting at 6:18 p.m.

FILED SUBJECT TO APPROVAL

Respectfully submitted,

Janet M. Hill
Land Use Coordinator