Planning Commission

MINUTES

Public Hearing

November 13, 2013

7:00 p.m. Main Hall

MEMBERS PRESENT: Ms. Gager, Mrs. Jahnke, Mr. Carey, Mr. Rimsky,

Mr. Frank

ALTERNATES PRESENT: Mr. Bedini, Mrs. Tibbatts

STAFF PRESENT: Mrs. Hill

ALSO PRESENT: Mr. Lyon, Mr. Hileman, Mrs. Roberts, Mr. Low, Ms. Kaplan, Ms. Sedelnick, Ms. J. Gorra, Mr. Heffernon, Mr. Barnet, Mrs. Keilty, Mr. Hollinger, Mrs. Payne, Mr. and Mrs. Letlam

Mr. Sherr, Mr. Owen, Mr. Seeley, Mr. Charles,

Mr. and Mrs. Owens, Mr. Arturi, Mrs. Frank,

Mr. and Mrs. Boyer, Mr. DuBois, Ms. Root, Mr. and Mrs. Matthews, Mr. Zekas, Mrs. Pond, Mr. and Mrs. Smith, Mr. and Mrs. Millington, Mr. Solley, Mr. Werkhoven, Ms. McGarr,

Mr. Bent, Mr. Saunders, Mr. and Mrs. Canal, Mrs. Gorra, and other residents

Ms. Gager called the public hearing to order at 7:05 p.m. and seated Members Gager, Jahnke, Carey, Frank, and Rimsky. She then read the legal notice published in Voices on November 1 and November 8, 2014.

Mr. Lyon thanked the Planning Commission for its efforts and said he agreed with comments from the Northwest Hills Council of Governments calling the draft Plan “comprehensive, thoughtful, and well written.”

Ms. Gager seated Members Gager, Jahnke, Rimsky, Carey, and Frank and noted Alternates Bedini and Tibbatts were in attendance.

The Planning commissioners stood to show their appreciation and recognize past Chairman Addie Roberts and her work on the Plan of Conservation and Development.

Ms. Gager read into the record the list of letters received to date: 1. from Jane and Howard Barnet, dated 11/8/14 and 2. from Mr. Owen and Mr. Seeley, past Zoning Commission chairmen, dated 11/11/14, both letters citing concerns that recently added language to the draft Plan regarding country clubs could be interpreted as supporting and encouraging non conforming uses in the residential districts. Also received was the staff review from the NHCOG, which noted the Plan was consistent with both the regional and state Plans of Conservation and Development and included information sheets entitled, “How to Make Your Town More Farm Friendly,” “Funding Programs to Support Agriculture and Preserve Farmland,” and “Farm Viability Grant for Municipalities and Non Profits.” She then read an introductory statement.

The commissioners presented a brief explanation for each of the chapters in the Plan: Demographics and Housing – Mr. Frank, Economic Development – Mr. Bedini, Village Centers – Mr. Rimsky, Natural Resources and Open Space and Community Facilities – Mr. Carey, and Sustainability – Ms. Gager. After the opening remarks for each chapter the public was asked for questions and comments.

Demographics and Housing: No questions or comments

Economic Development:

Mr. Arturi said he agreed with Mr. and Mrs. Barnet, Mr. Owen, and Mr. Seeley. He thought the current language regarding clubs would have the unintentional consequence of permitting uses previously restricted to the business districts to expand into the residential districts. He asked the Commission to revise the language according to Mr. Owen’s and Mr. Seeley’s recommendations.

Mrs. Keilty, president of the Washington Business Association, welcomed the recommendation that the Town hire an economic development director, said it was sorely needed, and offered the WBA’s services to help implement the Plan.

Ms. Kaplan noted that the critical and fundamental issues of housing, economic development, and the village centers are connected and complex and must be considered each as a part of the whole. She thought the recommendation for an economic development director was a critical element of the Plan, that he should have both a strong business and marketing background, and that he would be an important bridge between residents and commercial interests in Town.

Village Centers: No questions or comments

Natural Resources and Open Space: No questions or comments

Community Facilities: No questions or comments

Sustainability: No questions or comments

Several general questions and comments followed.

Ms. Kaplan thought it would be helpful if the Planning commissioners met with smaller groups to discuss the main topics of the Plan. She said there would be better feedback from smaller groups focusing on specific issues.

Mrs. Frank was concerned that so much Town land is in 490 and said she thought owners of two acre parcels were paying substantially more in taxes than were owners of much larger properties. She thought this was a lack of fairness to those not eligible for 490; a “real inequity in taxes.”

Mr. Lyon pointed out that many of the recommendations needing needing an allocation of funds were listed under the jurisdiction of the Board of Selectmen and said some had been previously been turned down at Town Meetings. He thought the Plan was on the right track, but was concerned that its implementation would fall to his office and would cost the taxpayers money. He hoped the public would contact the Selectmen’s Office to voice its support as each of the recommendations was considered.

Mr. Millington noted that Washington does not have enough people and has no industry. He thought the Town should work to attract hi tech industries and asked if anyone had contacted nearby companies to ask what could be done to attract them to Washington. He noted the Town is filled with intelligent people and educational facilities, but said unless it could attract new people, it would fail and become a gated community.

Mrs. Matthews stated that a full time, not part time, economic development director is needed and asked what could be done to get a full time director approved. Mr. Lyon responded the budget process would begin early in 2015 and both the Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance would consider it once a proposal with a job description was received. Mr. Rimsky advised Mrs. Matthews that a subcommittee was already working on a job description and qualifications. Mrs. Matthews offered to help in any way possible and urged Mr. Lyon to take a leadership role on this issue.

Ms. McGarr said Washington is a small Town that cannot take on the expense of a full time economic development director. She urged instead that the Commission reach out to other towns in the region to share both the director and the expense. Ms. Gager responded that the subcommittee is currently considering whether the economic development director should be full or part time and whether he should serve only Washington or work for a group of towns in the region.

Mr. Saunders thought it would benefit the Town to hire an economic development director to work on filling the empty stores.

Ms. Gager thanked the Conservation Commission for its support and feedback. She noted the Plan of Conservation and Development is not the Commission’s document, but is the Town’s Plan. She said the Commission would tap into all of the public’s expertise as it begins work to implement the Plan.

There were no other questions or comments from the public.

Ms. Gager closed the public hearing at 7:47 p.m.

FILED SUBJECT TO APPROVAL

Respectfully submitted,

Janet M. Hill

Land Use Administrator

(Copies of the introductory statements are available in the Land Use Office.)