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Town of North Reading
Massachusetts

TOWN CLERK
NORTH READING, MA

Community Planning

MINUTES

Tuesday, June 1, 2021

Mr. Warren Pearce, Chairperson called the Tuesday, June 1, 2021 meeting of the Community Planning Commission to order at 7:30p.m. via Virtual Meeting (Zoom, participants may call 1-301-715-8592, meeting code 9854300926.

MEMBERS

PRESENT:

Warren Pearce, Chairperson
Christopher Hayden, Vice Chairperson
David Rudloff
Jeremiah Johnston

STAFF

PRESENT:

Danielle McKnight, AICP
Town Planner/Community Planning Administrator
Debra Savarese, Administrative Assistant

Mr. Pearce informed all present that the meeting is being recorded.

Mrs. McKnight read: Pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §18, and the Governor's March 15, 2020 Order imposing strict limitations on the number of people that may gather in one place, this meeting of the North Reading Community Planning Commission IS BEING CONDUCTED VIA REMOTE PARTICIPATION. No in-person attendance of members of the public will be permitted, but every effort will be made to ensure that the public can adequately access the proceedings as provided for in the Order. A reminder that persons who would like to listen to this meeting while in progress may do so by calling in 1-301-715-8592 and meeting code 9854300926.

Ipswich River Watershed – Bylaw review training - discussion

Sadie W. stated that she is a college student working with the Ipswich River Watershed Association as a climate policy specialist. She works with Patrick Lynch, and they are recruiting planning board members from local towns for a bylaw review training program with the Mass. Audubon Society. The training program is free for all greenscapes municipal members and its part of their ongoing efforts to help various planning boards, conservation commissions and other town boards and staff review and revise bylaws and regulations to promote low impact development. They are currently finalizing the date and time for the introductory webinar which will take place sometime in late June. Mass. Audubon will also be finalizing its new curriculum for launch sometime in September. Something that is really helpful for them to know in advance and part of why she is today to ask which, if any, local bylaws or regulations, the planning board would prioritize trying to review. Mass. Audubon's bylaw review tool is really comprehensive and covers just about any bylaws. The IRWA has received a grant from Essex County Community Foundation's Land and Environment Initiative to provide additional one-on-one assistance for any towns, who agree to participate in the training program, and this one-on-one can prioritize which bylaws or regulations they want to review and revise first. Since she's relatively a new staff member she can do her best to try to answer any questions that the CPC may have, or she will write down any questions and get back to the CPC, later on.

Mr. Pearce asked what does the training entail.

Sadie W. stated that it's a training about how to use Mass. Audubon's bylaw review tool and it will help make bylaws and regulations more sustainable. They want to get their tool widespread throughout towns in Massachusetts.

Mr. Rudloff asked if Mass. Audubon has any bullets of what they would like to see towns do differently.

Sadie W. stated that they're trying to encourage nature based solutions, and could drop a link to a description of the tool.

200 Riverpark Drive – Site Plan Review – cont. P.H. 7:45pm

Mr. Hayden moved, seconded by Mr. Rudloff and voted 4-0: (Mr. Carroll absent)

I move that the Community Planning Commission vote to approve the plan entitled “GMP Warehouse Masterplan”, 200 Riverpark Drive, North Reading, Massachusetts; drawn by BSC Group; dated April 5, 2021, as amended this evening.

Mr. Pearce asked for a roll call: Mr. Rudloff, Mr. Hayden, Mr. Johnston and Mr. Pearce in favor, none opposed. (Mr. Carroll absent)

Longhill Lane – Bond release

Mr. Hayden moved, seconded by Mr. Rudloff and voted 4-0: (Mr. Carroll absent)

I move that the Community Planning Commission vote to release all remaining funds (\$5,000.00) for the bond being held for the Long Hill Lane subdivision, as all work is now complete.

Mr. Pearce asked for a roll call: Mr. Hayden, Mr. Rudloff, Mr. Johnston and Mr. Pearce in favor, none opposed. (Mr. Carroll absent)

Habitat for Humanity - discussion

Mrs. McKnight stated that she reached out to the Housing Services office to request if they could help us put together an RFP. She also informed Michael Gilleberto, Town Administrator that this is something that the CPC is considering. If the CPC is planning to target the October Town meeting for this that we probably would want to have a discussion with the Select Board soon, and the Town Administrator had suggested June 21st might be a good time to discuss that with them. She is still waiting for Habitat to get back to her, as far as confirming what properties they’re actually interested in.

Mr. Pearce asked Mrs. McKnight if the CPC is going to provide the Select Board with a list of properties that the CPC decided, would be useful for this purpose and the Select Board is going to pick the one(s) that they think will work.

Mrs. McKnight stated that that is correct, and based on the last CPC meeting it looked like Habitat had it down to four properties, if not all of them. (2 on Oakdale Road, 1 on Haverhill Street and 1 on St. Theresa Street) But, their engineer still has to review.

Mr. Pearce asked if these properties would be gifted to Habitat.

Mrs. McKnight stated that we will do an RFP for the disposition, but the idea would be the donation of the land.

Mr. Pearce asked if someone else puts in an RFP to build a 40B, and they'll give \$100,000.00 for the land, do they get it, if they're willing to build what we want built there, as opposed to the town gifting it to Habitat? How does an RFP work, if there is really a no competition situation?

Mrs. McKnight stated that the RFP would not be set up, so that it would be the highest bidder. It would be set up, so that we are very clear about what our goals are and if our goals are to donate the property and to donate it to an organization that involves volunteer labor for construction, and there is a maximum of three to five units, and we would structure the RFP that way, and we have the right to not accept other proposals if we didn't like them.

Mr. Hayden stated that one of the demands is that it's going to be deeded 100% affordable and in perpetuity.

35 Main Street – Minor modification

Mr. Jonathan Hall of Arenhall Corp. stated that in May 2017 a site plan was approved for a 3-story self-storage facility. During the approval process, members of the board made a request to make the site mixed-use and suggested to add retail spaces to the first floor of the building. They added seven retail spaces, 12, 600 sq. ft. in total, one of which they use as their office for the storage rental. They hired Atlantic Realty who was familiar with the area, almost two years ago, to market and lease the 6 spaces. To date all six units are still vacant. He would like to ask the board for a minor modification to the site plan by removing the retail and adding additional self-storage space. There would be minimal changes to the exterior of the existing building. They would replace a number of the existing store front glass, pass thru doors with glass sliders (similar to the existing glass sliders currently existing on both sides of the building) within the existing doorway openings. In addition, they may have to change the concrete sidewalk in front of the building, adding additional ramps, similar to existing handicap ramps. There is another building at 25 Main Street that has four or five empty retail spots, as well.

Mr. Hayden stated that the site plan was approved in May of 2017, but he believes that the storage units were no available for occupation until late 2019.

Mr. Hall stated that is correct, but they started marketing them four or five months before they opened.

Mr. Hayden stated that he understands, but we got a year of nobody's going anywhere and places were closing because of the Covid-19. He would just like to see it go a little bit longer and, hopefully, with all the new stuff that's coming up right now, people are going to start either growing their businesses and needing a bigger place, or opening new ones. The building

at 25 Main Street did not get the water installed until last spring, and didn't have a curb cut, and there were a few other issues. He asked Mr. Hall if the entire storage facility was filled to capacity.

Mr. Hall stated that they just completed the third floor at the beginning of March, so they've completed the storage portion of the project, and they still have plenty of vacancies. Even if they were to reduce the number of retail stores, that would help. They were not opposed to the concept of having the retail because they thought it brings people to the site, so their familiar with us, for the self-storage rooms. He just wants to be ready for when people have the need.

Mr. Pearce stated that the real estate agent must have you competitively priced.

Mr. Hall stated that they've had some people interested and they came back to use and we've lowered the going rate and it still hasn't worked out for one reason or another.

Mr. Pearce stated that this has been a tough market for any number of reasons where other who have tried build retail space have had difficulty finding takers, but again, it's most of what he's heard is recent, within the last two years. So, he thinks there is an issue, but he doesn't believe that it's a long term issue. He is proposing a six month moratorium, and if they're still in dire straits, then the CPC would take another look at the situation.

Mr. Hall asked if they could knock the retail units down to three units. They would then be able to allow those people more water usage because they're on a septic system and they're limited to 100 gallons per unit, so that eliminates hair salons, nail salons, etc., and that would also give more parking per unit which would increase other opportunities.

Mr. Hayden asked Mr. Hall if he could put two units together there.

Mr. Hall stated that they could be bundled together. Their office is in the middle of the retail units, so there would be 5400 sq. ft. on both sides.

Mr. Rudloff stated that he agrees with Mr. Hayden because it's been a tough year to judge the lack of success with knowing how Massachusetts and most states, in the country, have shut down and there just hasn't been anyone going out there gobbling up retail space, due to the environment, which is only just been opened up, as of Saturday. He's not opposed to it, but he'd like to see them give it a little bit more of a shot, now that things are opening up.

Mr. Johnston stated that he concurs with that, especially considering that, once the change is made, there's no going back from that, at least not easily. It seems like the original intent of the approval still is relevant, so giving it a little more time, is warranted.

Mr. Hayden stated that he is in agreement with the six months, but if Mr. Hall were to have a signed lease that was going to take up 50% of his water use and take up two of his units, maybe he could come in then and we could release one of the units because he wouldn't have the water flow for it.

Mr. Johnston stated that the three months seems too short and if there's going to be a transition back to normality it's not going to happen overnight, but six months seems appropriate and he agrees with Mr. Hayden that Mr. Hall could come back in three months if there is a change.

Mr. Rudloff stated that he agrees with that too. He thinks that leaving the door open for those circumstances where the CPC could entertain some modification in the interim of six months.

Mr. Pearce stated that the CPC is sensitive to the issue, but would like to give it a little more time.

Mr. Hall stated that he just wanted to clarify that it's not the water use. It's the septic system.

The consensus of the Community Planning Commission is to wait another six months before agreeing to a modification, unless there is a change in the rental of the units.

110-124 Main Street – SPR and Floodplain Special Permit – cont. P.H. 7:30pm

Mr. Hayden moved, seconded by Mr. Rudloff and voted 4-0: (Mr. Carroll absent)

that the Community Planning Commission vote to grant the requested continuance for the public hearing for 110-124 Main Street until Tuesday, June 15, 2021 @ 8:00pm

Mr. Pearce asked for a roll call: Mr. Hayden, Mr. Rudloff, Mr. Johnston and Mr. Pearce in favor, none opposed. (Mr. Carroll absent)

Planning Administrator Updates

- Town Meeting – starts on June 5, 2021 at 8:30am.
- EDC business event – Horseshoe Grille on June 8, 2021 @ 5:30pm

Adjournment at 8:34PM

Respectfully submitted,



Ryan Carroll, Clerk