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Town of North Reading
Massachusetts

Community Planning

TOWN CLERK
NORTH READING, MA

MINUTES

Tuesday, May 19, 2020

Mr. Warren Pearce, Chairperson called the Tuesday, May 19, 2020 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
Ryan Carroll, Clerk
Christopher Hayden
David Rudloff

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.

Mr. Pearce read the 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.

Mr. David Eisen of Abacus [Architects + Planners] stated on 1/14/2020 the CPC asked them to create a vision for a center of community life in North Reading. As they understood it, on the one hand we didn't want to be tethered to exactly where properties began and stopped. They didn't want to be tethered to existing uses, the CPC wanted to them to use their creativity in coming up with a vision and on the other hand he thinks that there's the expectation this was connected to reality and development scenarios that could actually happen. These properties are all owned by private property owners to be a return on their investment. So, there needed to be a balance between the vision and reality. Another reality is there isn't town sewer and to look at the opportunities for a package system. So, they followed up on all of that and what they are going to show you is a series to different options that they think are visionary, but all can be accomplished. They're all plans, but are all connected to photographs of real places that seemed like the kind of places the CPC would want in North Reading. They did a preliminary discussion with an engineer who said to them: "Yes, this is the reason you couldn't have a package system. It's workable, it's cost effective" and they sort of dotted onto these plans the outlines of those package systems.

Mr. Rich Wallner, Select Board stated that the approach was if they had to do it all over again what would we do. So, we came at it from that point of view, fresh design, fresh look and then when we get something were close to, we can back off and get back to reality, but right now were just trying to come up with open mind.

Mr. David Eisen stated that their hope is to get some feedback in showing you a series of options, were hoping that these can be narrowed down to the options that the CPC wants them to pursue. They can do some variations on them with the hope and expectations that we can go out to the broader public which obviously needs to include the property owners. So, it's what the CPC is comfortable with.

Mr. David Pollak of Abacus [Architects + Planners] presented a PowerPoint (see attached). He stated that there are a fair number of slides, not that imposing, but at any rate the first dozen or so, are really about site constraints, a broad overview of the sites. CPC wanted them to look at the sites located at Winter and Main Street, Martin's Brook. The largest site is Stop & Shop, located at 197 Main Street which is surrounded by wetlands. In the initial study, they kind of

ignored any kind of rises and dips, although some are significant. There is a larger parcel located south of the intersection and then there is Kitty's Restaurant, the retail block and parking lot, north of the parcel. They're kind of mixed and matched, mostly he is going to talk about the organizational plans for the larger parcel, but mixed in are different visions for the northern parcel, with less or more of redevelopment.

Mr. Austin Ludwig of Abacus [Architects + Planners] stated that they based initial calculations on the MAPC report, so, this where they come up with the 43,000 sq. ft. of commercial with 6 restaurants, 175, 1-bedroom units and 75, 3-bedroom units. Those numbers in determining the sizes will be shown on the plan. There is a large leaching field, sometimes they show it as a town green or under a parking lot. The next piece of the puzzle is the processing tanks and are similar to the leaching field that can be hidden under ground, but usually want a little more access to them, but can still be hidden. One store front in the development will be hiding this actually processing facility and they sent them an estimate cost in the range of 3 million dollars. One last note: In comparing this in the level they show, a lot of the development is a little bit higher than the MAPC study suggested. This is based on everything built and occupied at once and opening up on the same day. The other study that they did shows soil types and the parcel at Winter and Main Street has great soil for leaching fields which is most of the southern site.

Mr. Pollak stated that obviously if some of the plans they show, show more building, but you could do this package system modular, but, also, before you do more building we would probably be 20 years out and he knows that the CPC would like to see municipal sewer in place by then, it could pick it up. To keep the planning relatively simple they've shown 3 types of buildings. Lower, medium density homes which are single family attached townhouses (or row homes), multi-story residential over shops/restaurants, 3 to 5 stories with ground floor commercial and community/civic buildings. They have all so shown a lot of parking which is not scaled, but some of the plans show more buildings, but don't have more parking. These are all conceptual plans for how the site might be used. (See attached PowerPoint for pictures) In order to make a town center that the CPC has asked them to explore, they really feel that the starting point is with civic outdoor space, it just can't be done with buildings, it's got to be done with public space. They have explored three ways of organizing public space to make a center for North Reading. Town greens is one approach, which North Reading already has, pedestrian streets and public/market squares. These are the three types of spaces that they use as starting points and then they recognize the concepts of the whole site around these outdoor spaces. Sketch #1 - Town Green A is pretty simple. The town green is in the middle of the site, there are two streets, from Winter Street thru to Main Street that bound the green and then the green is surrounded by homes. The south half of the site is residential and the community building is surrounded by outdoor space adjacent to the wetlands and Martin's Brook. The commercial lines the streets at the corner of Main Street and Winter Street with a larger parking lot and parking on the streets. Sketch #2 - Town Green B shows the green as part of Main Street that is maybe attached to a vision of an evolving Main Street that has evolving uses that might be more civic. In this scheme the green is surrounded by homes, the community center, restaurants and shops with apartments above. The west side of the site, Main Street is

mainly commercial and the Winter Street side is residential. So, all of the schemes are kind of along the same lines with high level use concepts and zoning. There is very little intervention with Kitty's Restaurant. Pedestrian Streets: Pearl Street in Boulder, Colorado which is probably one of the most successful streets in the country, but there are others. All kinds of things can be developed in the street. Sketch #1 - Pedestrian Street A, the center of the site is developed as a long skinny civic space. It is drawn more park like, but it can be drawn as more of a green or more paved activities. The sidewalks are 15' wide, plenty of room for outdoor dining and bounded at the head and tail with important buildings. There are larger linked parking lots to serve the commercial buildings with a thru street from Winter to Main. Sketch #2 - Pedestrian Street B is not much different. It only changes at the top end by opening up with a park, a pavilion that could be a restaurant or coffee shop and a market square. Picture #1 - Fort Collins, Colorado market square surrounded by two and three story buildings, a bandstand, markets and outdoor dining. Picture #2 - Bow Market in Somerville, Mass., smaller area with commercial space surrounded by shops on two floors. Picture #3 - Denver Central Market, butcher and baker shops, bars and candy shops, all centralized. Everyone uses the same facilities and opens up to the outside with outdoor dining. Sketch #4 - Town Square, North Reading, showing market hall, single story with shops and restaurants, surrounded by apartments buildings with shops on the ground floor. Interconnected public spaces, the large space would be the civic area with the community building and parking in the rear. Two streets that connect from Main to Winter Streets. Picture #5, 6, 7 and 8 - Stanley Marketplace in Aurora, Colorado shows reuse of an existing building which could happen to the Stop & Shop building. Picture #9 - Worcester, Mass public market shows social and commercial use. Sketch #5 - Ocean State Job Lot (formerly Stop & Shop) shows market hall, site is divided up into a commercial street with apartments and shops, with access and egress from Winter Street.

Mr. Pearce asked if they wanted to know which particular format or form would work best for North Reading.

Mr. Pollack stated that they want to know how to move forward with what would be most effective.

Mr. Rudloff stated that all of them kind of assume a flat equal grade. Such as the Hefferon site which is at a high point. Would that be taken down to level off the site?

Mr. Pollack stated that if the CPC was to say build this, then that is what would be what's assumed in this drawing, but once they get some direction as to what the preferred approach is and we get engineer's involved, the pedestrian street might curve around or go over that hill. They really haven't study the site in any detail and economics have not yet been considered and even a more significant set of parameters that are probably going to influence the design then the site grading, is probably property ownership. It's possible that this site would be aggregated and redeveloped whole, but it's also possible that it gets walked into incrementally, starting in one part and then to another.

Mr. Eisen stated that part of it is the ups and downs seem a little artificial and they're relatively localized, it's not as if the entire site slopes 10' from one side to the other. So, in their experience if you wanted to level it out it wouldn't be a crazy thing to do. We could leave all of these concepts on the table and get more input from other people.

Mr. Hayden stated that the Northern property is Kitty's restaurant. Are you assuming that the on-site disposal site can handle that acreage?

Mr. Pearce stated that basically the design was for a certain number of square feet for restaurants and other facilities on the site, but Kitty's was most likely included.

Mr. Ludwig stated that the study the on-site engineer used was part of the presentation of the On Site Waste Water Treatment. The MAPC study, in terms of acreage, included a lot more properties, north and south than they did. So, their distances are based off of that larger footprint. We're using that as an approximation of how many new apartments can North Reading handle, not how many apartments can this acreage handle.

Mr. Pollack stated that the idea that the package system could be modular and could plan out with expansion capability and utilized all of the capacity of the first increment, the town would have the funding/tax revenue and could expand as long as you preserved an area of the greenspace or parking lots to install the additional system or the town may have sewer by then.

Mr. Pearce stated that he thinks that it is necessary for the CPC to begin to narrow this down to what they think would be the most successful or the one that they might want to get behind and give Abacus some direction. It's a little difficult to do that in a Zoom meeting because they cannot put all of the sketches side by side to look at.

Mr. Rudloff asked if Abacus could provide them with a simple matrix of the list of the different scenarios and in the matrix provide some of the variables. How much is housing? Number of townhouses and apartments and then they may be able to whittle it down.

Mr. Pollack stated that they could provide that, but would not advise it. The amount of building in each of these is idiosyncratic. The CPC should really focus on the organization and the town center because on any of these concepts they can dial it up the intensity and dial it back down. Essentially, anywhere that you see the yellow town home bar with dividers, that could turn into an apartment building and vice versa.

Mr. Rudloff stated that he agrees. He thinks Abacus wants to stay high-level and he wasn't inclined that it would be so precise and thought there would be other columns that would be a little broader. In looking at these as a group with the CPC or individually and then come together at a meeting to go over it, intuitively, do we know what these colors are all the time because he sees the keys he can use, but Abacus' description was a little bit more helpful.

Mr. Pollack stated that the less dramatic question to think about is if you want to present to the community the idea of a civic green as the organizing space, should it be in the center of the site or at the edge of the site. And, it is better to have homes around it, or commercial buildings.

Mr. Rudloff stated that he really likes how he did these two concepts. They're great examples of an organization that made tons of sense and then giving it a different look and how you made the green adjacent to Main Street.

Mr. Eisen made a suggestion that this is less about numbers, re. How many apartments and how many stores. What it's really about is experience. How much experience does the CPC want to provide as a long term vision to North Reading? So, they can list each of these schemes and with three or four bullet points, note the experience. Really simple and focused.

Mr. Pearce stated that they need some sort of a pathway to begin to make a decision. The discussion was important in understanding them, but agrees with Mr. Rudloff with some of the basics to whittle it down. He does like both, but likes the greenspace/public space in the middle.

Mr. Pollack stated that the blue dotted lines on the sketches represent the septic area.

Mr. Carroll asked if the all CPC members had a preference. His initial reaction was that he liked the town hall model, but then he was blown away by the pedestrian street because it's activating in itself because people will know what to do when they go there. It's a place that draws you to it, whereas just the generic town center may work in some locations, but in a lot of places it just ends up being a field to mow. People are going to go there and bring their vision to utilize that space. We have a lot of greenspace in town and is utilized in various ways, but he wonders if they need more open green fields or something that is actually going to bring people and engage people to bring business to North Reading.

Mr. Pollack stated that in terms of the toggle if there was a sense that Winter Street wanted to be quieter the three commercial buildings could become townhomes.

Mr. Eisen stated that it's what private developers want to do and their input would be helpful.

Mr. Pearce stated that it's very reminiscence of what they wanted to do with the Berry Center on Lowell Street, but it was market driven. So, we might have a similar situation where they could recognize from the MAPC study what we might be looking for, for stores and residential. We need to get the basic plan out there and then the market is going to drive the outcome.

Mr. Carroll stated that we need to narrow down the style.

Mr. Rich Wallner of the Select Board stated that the initial goal is that this is intended to be more of an adult space. The great news is that there is a recording of this and we can replay it over and over for all of the audience to get more input. He thinks it would be great if the CPC and a larger audience could pick the best one for each of the three approaches. If there is one approach that is going to be more favorable for a developer to build it, we should know that.

Mr. Pearce asked if they should have a couple of developers come in and look at what we have for plans and give us an idea of what they would like to build. It would have to be developers that recognize what the market is and what is likely to work.

Mr. Carroll stated that he thinks they need to pick a style first because then you can start to work that layout around lot lines.

Mr. Pearce said they could also pick a couple of them. He has a top two that he likes, what about anyone else.

Mr. Hayden stated that he agrees with Mr. Carroll about sketches A & B. Do we need more town green because we have a large town green and it's utilized a few times a year? He thinks that they can take the first two off of the table and look at the last four.

Mr. Pollack stated that there is not much difference. If you wanted to evaluate it is just the north end of the site with a farmer's market area and a park.

Mr. Carroll stated that the coffee shop (Heavenly Donuts) is one of the newest buildings in town and they may have to program around it.

Mr. Rudloff stated that they could be moved.

Mr. Carroll stated that we would have to have a lot of momentum to move the coffee shop.

Mr. Pearce stated that if it was included in the design plan the access could be improved dramatically and put something complimentary next to it.

Mr. Hayden stated that they don't want to forget about the coffee shop because they came to town and designed it the way that the CPC had envisioned on Main Street.

Mr. Carroll asked if there were examples of the Market Hall working because North Reading is a relatively rural town, it seems to him that that is a denser concept. Would that be successful in this town?

Mr. Pollack stated that the developers are going to make the ruling on that. It would require a market study and a developer who thought it was the right idea.

Mr. Hayden stated that it has the Market Hall and that other public building, so we would be building two new buildings. We have the Stop & Shop building that is bigger. How about utilizing Stop & shop for both of those since it already exist.

Mr. Pearce stated that the community building is going to be a multi-story building for different things and the Stop & Shop is one-story.

Mr. Hayden stated that there is probably enough room to make the Stop & shop two-stories.

Mr. Pollack stated that is what they did to the building in Aurora. It's a little tight and you would want more space in a community building. Re-utilizing a building like that does not cut your costs. You really have to say is it suiting your needs.

Mr. Eisen stated that one of the things that they talked about is reusing the Stop & Shop for anything, really cost effective. By the time you meet contemporary codes and put in bathrooms, but it's tough to make rehabs pay.

Mr. Pearce stated that that building is basically a great big shell. That building should just go away.

Mr. Carroll stated that he still has the same concern about the other Market Hall. In the plan it's the focus of all re-development and something like that working and working well, being an attraction, for the long term. He just wonders if that's going to be a fad or a style that last vs. the more traditional pedestrian street with smaller retail shops. He thinks it's timeless and the best chance for development.

Mr. Rudloff stated that he did not like the concept with more residential.

Mr. Pollack stated that is also the one that reuses the Stop & Shop building.

Mr. Pearce stated that Kitty's Restaurant is a landmark and what they need to pay attention to is that town is very proud of their small town history and are going to want to hold on to it. We would be better off with the smaller stores.

Mrs. McKnight stated that in terms of the uses we have set out here, she thinks that they have kept it pretty generic in terms of the community facilities, because it could be a town hall, a recreational, or a community center; or it could be none of those things. It could some other community oriented facility. She has heard a lot of support from the CPC for there being a town facility, but she wants to be sure when they're looking at these plans we consider the possibilities that if that doesn't come to pass she wants to be sure that we still have a plan we can work with. Those community facilities are not necessarily tied to be one thing. For example: If we had a particular building identified as a community facility and it didn't work out that it could be a restaurant or a retail store. Is this still a correct assumption?

Mr. Hayden stated that it is for him.

Mr. Pearce stated that it's something that might be attractive to the town because they existing town hall, not only because of the condition of it, but also its location is not very convenient. He thinks that if they pick a design/plan or two of them, and we began to move them forward, the opportunity to put a town building somewhere in the mix, exist. It certainly not exemptible.

Mr. Eisen stated that if it doesn't happen it could be greenspace and maybe in 20 years the town hall would be relocated.

Mr. Hayden stated that listening to everybody it sounds like they have it at two designs. Pedestrian Street A or B and the town square.

Mr. Pearce asked if they like the concept with the market hall. They could possibly change it to a restaurant.

Mr. Wallner stated that he likes the town square, but he is also not opposed to the market hall.

Mr. Pearce stated that for the market hall to be successful we would have to draw from the surrounding towns.

Mr. Eisen stated that the key thing is not the market hall it's the market square.

Mr. Hayden stated that it should be kept in the mix.

Mr. Rudloff stated that he likes the schemes that show the points at Main Street and Winter Street more open, where you have a view inside.

Mr. Eisen stated that there are developer and landowners, does this go out to the landowners first.

Mr. Pearce stated that if they go to the landowners first, with seven plans, they're going to have the same problems that we are having in the decision, but they are going to be looking at from their own perspective, so he thinks that their job is to narrow it down to three different proposals that they can look at and say that they can see their business in there.

Mr. Carroll stated that the one thing he does like on the market hall concept that isn't on the pedestrian street option is that kind of larger open area, for a gathering space and he wonders if by tweaking some of the buildings in one of the pedestrian street options they could create that same kind of round area where one of the cross streets or alleys that goes between the buildings and actually have the best of both worlds. We could create a larger gathering and would provide both of those options.

Mr. Pollack stated that one of the challenges they had had for the site is at the narrow end they put a whole lot of commercial use in there, or apartments, the commercial use pushes the parking to a distance which means a longer walk and will people use these uses.

Mr. Ken Hefferon asked how many landowners they are talking about.

Mrs. McKnight stated that she thinks it's ten, but she would have to check.

Mr. Hayden stated that it is only six owners.

Mr. Hefferon asked if anyone has approached these owners to see if they would be interested in this.

Mr. Pearce stated that they have talked to a few of them and have had positive responses, but would like to see what is proposed.

Mr. Carroll asked on the pedestrian streets it says for the commercial buildings, with or without apartments above. Are these counts based on the apartments being above, or not?

Mr. Pollack stated that yes, but the apartments counts are on a per floor basis, so if you look at the chart it says this scheme which has the densest drawing – 93 apartments per floor. So, if all of the buildings were three-story with two levels of parking, there would be 186 apartments in the multi-family building, but if they were four-story buildings with three levels of parking, there would be 279.

Mr. Hayden stated that he would like to see the bullet points before making a decision.

Mr. Pearce stated that Kitty's Restaurant should be removed from the concept.

Mr. Wallner stated that they should speak to the owners of Kitty's to see if they want to get involved, if not, then take it out of the plan.

Adjournment at 9:33PM

Respectfully submitted,


Ryan Carroll, Clerk