

Planning Advisory Committee

10 October 2017

Minutes

Attendees

Members/Staff: Rosa Ergas, Ann Jackson, Laurie Green, Adam Nelson, Haas Tobey, Bruce Rockwood, Robin Mayer

Staff/Guests: Matt Lutkus, Tony Dater, Jenny Begin

The meeting opened with a follow-up to the Gateway 1 workshop. Bruce Rockwood indicated that the problem is not so much the ordinances, but enforcement of the ordinances (Section 11.5, paragraphs A & B). Bruce suggested that the appearance criteria be included up front on the checklist. He also suggested a presumption against waivers. If that were the case, Bruce thought that developers would come to the Planning Board more prepared. He noted that while we do need more taxable property, ~~would~~ ^{we} could also have better building design.

Haas Tobey agreed with what's needed (from the Gateway 1 presentation), using the tools currently available to the Town/Planning Board, and more aligned with the 'wants' of the people who live in Damariscotta. He agreed that the Town needs to make its expectations more clear, suggesting that pictures of 'desirable' building design be provided to developers.

Bruce and Haas ~~both~~ suggested a document to illustrate 'appropriate' building design (based on the ordinance requirements), using examples approved by the Town. Bruce proposed new language to 'put developers on notice' of the Town's expectations.

Bruce indicated that the Town should not invest major funding for a wholly new code but, rather, the developers should know the Town's expectations. At the same time, members of the community should be educated on the ordinance requirements.

Tony Dater noted that developers know that they can request waivers, but that the Planning Board is not required to grant them.

Rosa Ergas agreed that the current ordinances should have prevented the current development (Dollar General, Sherwin Williams), that there are requirements that, if the Planning Board had held to the requirements, there would have been more attractive development on the corner of Route 1B and Biscay Road. She noted that, if we want development to reflect the Comprehensive Plan and Heart & Soul process, we might think more creatively... walkable communities, shared parking, etc.

Jenny Began noted that there is too much public pressure to waive everything and give developers everything they want. Tony noted that the Comp Plan is where the community provides direction; the Planning Board puts the ordinances into play.

Bruce suggested that people who want to develop a particular parcel of land be encouraged to talk with the abutters to determine their interests. He also suggested that any alterations to existing land require the installation of a sidewalk.

Jenny questioned the power of enforcement of the ordinances, asking who was responsible for site inspections, suggesting that a checklist of inspections for commercial development (e.g., the new hospital building, YMCA expansion, etc.) Matt Lutkus noted that there is a provision in the ordinance for the developer to put money into escrow for an engineer (to conduct relevant inspections at the appropriate times).

Rosa asked about the community impact study—where does it go? Who decides on what to do with the results, etc. Matt noted that the Town should reinforce the provisions of the ordinances, making them stronger and tightening up the requirements.

Laurie Green said that the Comp Plan and Heart & Soul reports (i.e., Charrette) have relevant information, which would aid in strengthening current ordinances.

The question was asked about enforcing ordinance requirements, as there is a contingent of people who do not want any development.

Adam Nelson suggested that, whatever we do has to be “middle of the road,” that all can agree with. Laurie said that community conversations be held to find out what people want to see. Bruce noted that people are “getting into their corners” (e.g., letters to the editor), and whatever happens with the moratorium vote, the PAC has to continue to work on improvements.

Rosa asked about incentives for infill development.

Laurie noted that what’s driving the PAC is new development, and asked if the TVA has interest beyond the Village (e.g., Hannaford’s), wondering if a greater part of the conversation can include Hannaford’s and other outlying businesses. “Invite everyone-- ‘this is what we’re thinking, and want to include you in our planning’.” Matt noted that a lot of the Charrette was a visioning exercise, and that a number of the items identified in the process were adopted in the Comp Plan update in 2014.

Rosa recommended that we strengthen the current ordinances and additional committee/board to have a role in connecting developers—be creative in how to implement the Comp Plan (pg. x-6). Matt noted that we had a Comp Plan committee, and set aside an Economic Planning Committee (recommended by DPAC) until after the Comp Plan had been approved.

Haas noted that the PAC cares about this issue. He said that people who vote 'no' don't go to meetings. We (PAC) need to look at something that takes a minimum of effort, minimum of stirring the pot.

After more discussion, two problems were identified: (1) Ordinances are not communicated; (2) ordinances are not strictly enforced.

Rosa is concerned that citizens are not well informed about the ordinances, and Planning Board members change every few years.

Jenny said that part of the problem is that people don't understand the process. Bruce said that hearings for commercial development are held 30 minutes prior to a Planning Board meeting, and people generally don't pay attention. He suggested that the LCN write an article on how the process works (in some detail) to educate the community. After discussion, it was agreed that the public needs to be educated on the process (approving development) and hold the Planning Board accountable for following the ordinances. It was suggested that, for the longer term, a community/panel be developed to look at economic development. It was also recommended that guidelines for developers be published after ordinances were updated and tightened up. Laurie asked the PAC to think about another community planning committee after the PAC has finished its work.

Bruce noted that the Planning Board often has too much on its agenda for each meeting and that, perhaps, during times of increased development, the Board meet more than once a month.