

Minutes, Planning Board, meeting of December 20th, 2012 (**revised)

Present: Diane Poland (Chair), Joe Strzegowski, Mike Kurkulonis, and David Barten.
Absent: Kate Eugin-Moore. Presenters also present: Pixie Holbrook (Chair of Housing Committee), and Michelle Turre and Bob Anderson, Friends of the South River. Also present: Kathleen McKiernan, Greenfield Recorder.

The meeting began at 6:55. There were seven agenda items:

(1) Minutes—the revised draft minutes for the meeting of December 6th were unanimously accepted.

(2) Housing Committee—because Pixie Holbrook was present, Diane changed the order of agenda items, so Pixie came second and “Updates” third.

Pixie wanted to discuss the Housing Committee’s proposed project for the Rose property. The Committee had searched without success over several years for sites around Conway where a Senior housing complex might be built. The Town-owned Rose property, given its location and availability, now seems the place, and so the Committee, in an effort to make its thinking about a complex clear, had asked Joan Rockwell Associates to take the Committee’s ideas and design a complex. The money for this design came from the \$7500 awarded the Committee by the Town at an earlier time to help it research the need for Senior Housing. This drawing was placed before the Board.

In sum, the complex would be composed of three separate buildings. These would form a cluster at the southern end of the property, the several buildings linked by sidewalks and served by driveways.

As envisioned, there would be anywhere from six to twelve apartments spread over these units. One apartment would be a community center where the residents could meet and health care workers provide exercise classes, clinics, etc. The apartments would be 900 to 1000 sq. ft. , divided into large living room, bedroom, and a second room, bathroom, studio kitchen, all on one floor. A loft space could be created to provide extra space. The apartments would have large windows and higher than normal ceilings, and have basements. Apartments would be offered both for sale and rent, the rental cost being about \$600 per month.

As designed, the cluster complex would be energy-efficient and occupy less than a third of the total Rose property, thus, allowing for a community garden, and recreation areas.

The question was raised about who would own the project, the town or some private group. It was assumed that unless the Town wanted to establish a housing authority, that a non-profit could be organized, which would seek grants for

building the project on town land, and would be responsible for all aspects of managing the complex and its finances.

Pixie said there are no State funds available for the project, and so other sources would have to be sought. She mentioned Hilltown CDC and the Franklin County Housing Authority as possible granting agencies, and also the Town's CPA program.

Mike had several questions, one of which was whether there were any figures about how many Conway seniors would be interested in such apartments. Pixie said the Committee had contacted 96 residents, 23% of whom said they were very interested. Pixie added that the economic instability in the nation has led to some prosperous seniors asking whether a senior complex was in the works, because they might be interested in selling houses and scaling down.

(3) Updates—

Wastewater treatment: Diane said she was on the track of an outfit in Lowell that is known for being in the vanguard concerning the latest technology about leach fields. She was going to pursue the matter further.

Sinclair Water Works: Sue Bridge had volunteered to talk to hydrologists about aquifer maps for Conway. She had learned there are some helpful maps, and also that aquifers are rising. Diane will ask her to visit the Board and discuss what she has learned.

Master plan: Sue Bridge had provided a document showing how she would reorganize the existing draft, and what she would add that would bring it up to date. Diane will ask her to visit the Board, so the members can discuss her proposal with her.

Mission statement: Diane had drafted a short mission statement, which is intended to picture the Planning Board's responsibilities. She read this aloud, and the members all felt it was a very fine statement. Since the ideas Diane put forward derived in State law, Mike suggested that a printed statement should mention the sections of MGL cited.

(4) Change of reps to the CPC—Given the difficulty Kate has had in getting to the Community Preservation Committee meetings, it was thought best to choose another rep from the Planning Board who could attend CPC meetings on a regular basis, a representative being required by law. Since David had been the rep previous to Kate, and would be able to attend its meetings, he volunteered and was chosen to represent the Board on the Committee.

(5) Friends of the South River—Michelle Turre and Bob Anderson, representing the Friends group, had been invited to make a presentation about the flood mitigation project proposed for the stretch of the South River that extends north from the Rt. 116 bridge to the end of the Rose property, where the river makes an S-curve, then narrows. The project has been approved by the DEP, and a grant is pending that

would cover about two thirds of the approximately \$300,000 plus cost, the Town having to fund the rest.

Since both David and Joe are members of the FOSR, Joe having been the one who worked with Kimberly McPhee of FRCOG to get the grant, the discussion that followed the presentation could focus directly on questions about how the Rose property would be affected by the mitigation plan. Because Michelle, Bob, and Joe had maps showing topography of the property and floodplain designation, it was possible to see that the mitigation project would have little impact, except for the area where it is proposed that a piece of the Rose property be lowered by two feet. This change would allow the river, when in flood, to flow away from the privately held properties on the opposite shore, resulting in reduced flow and speed of water against this shore, thereby reducing erosion. It was observed that the lowered land lies within the designated floodplain.

The only question needing an answer, it was concluded, was whether the 200' buffer which extends from either bank of the river and exists by State law, would be changed and now extend from the edge of the lowered land mass, or continue to be drawn from the river's edge as presently defined. Should the buffer be changed, the Rose property could be impacted in such a way as to reduce the land area where a recreational field and community garden might be placed.

Because Natural Heritage has designated a portion of the river as the home to an endangered species of turtle, the entire Rose property can only have one designated change of use. At present, that use is for agriculture. The members were reminded that future use has to be carefully considered because once designation is changed, it can never be changed again.

(6) January 10th meeting—as scheduled, the Planning Board is hosting a meeting on January 10th in the Town Hall to which all parties having an interest in the Rose property will be invited. Initially, it was planned that each committee or individual would be asked to express its or his/her interest and, if a Committee or persons has worked up plans for a project, to present these. The question was how best to shape the occasion so that all pros and cons about projects could be identified and aired.

Diane presented a document that outlined a “program” for proceeding. Because she intended this as a take-off point, the members began to formulate a way of proceeding that was freer, and focused on “brainstorming,” a form of group discussion that does not start with presentations, but with, in this case, the group's first identifying the needs of the Town. The group would then focus on the land and buildings owned by the Town and the constraints posed by these different properties and buildings, then identify the stakeholders, or those present having interest/and or projects in mind for the Rose property and the pros and cons of projects as conceived, and whether any of the projects might be better served on other Town properties.

Members thought this was the approach to take, and Joe was identified as the guide/moderator, since he has conducted such sessions in his professional life. Diane, it was thought, should be his scribe, writing on a blackboard the ideas and concepts put forward by those participating.

The members realized that while a way of proceeding at the meeting had been identified, the actual planning for the meeting should continue, and so the next Planning Board, scheduled for January 3rd, will focus on the January 10th meeting as the single agenda item. Joe indicated that he would be away on the 3rd but wanted to participate through a conference call. Diane said she would arrange this.

(7) Concerns— Diane wanted this open-ended item to be a place in the meeting so members could express concerns. Mike felt that because so much play has been given the Planning Board/Select Board relationship in the Recorder, that the PB should send a note to the SB indicating that the members want very much to work with the SB. He indicated, however, that he had learned that the SB would not be represented at the January 10th meeting and thought this unfortunate, as did the other members. *(revised: it has since been learned that John O'Rourke will be present.)

Diane asked the members whether the meeting should end, and they agreed unanimously that it should, and the meeting ended at 9:15 pm. The next meeting will be January 3, 2013, 7:00 pm at the Town office.

Respectfully submitted,

David Barten, clerk