

Minutes Planning Board, March 5th, 2013

Present: Diane Poland (Chair), Joe Strzegowski (Vice- chair), Mike Kurkulonis, Kate Eugin-Moore, and David Barten. Invited presenters: Garage Committee—Ken Ouimette and Tom Shaw; Police Dept. –Ken Ouimette; Fire Dept. –Bob Baker; Ambulance—Jodi Benson. Also present, Ron Sweet, newly hired Town Road Boss.

The meeting began at 7:00 as posted. There were three agenda items:

(1) Minutes—the minutes for the meeting of February 21 were accepted after a revision was made on pg. 2, item a.: The dollar figure should be \$139,000;

(2) Quickies— Diane wanted to address the following:

a. The draft of the Master Plan is ready for review, and along with the members of the Planning Board, some thirty other readers will be invited to make comments;

b. She asked David to check on the date when a representative from the Park and Rec Committee appeared before the Board, and identify the person. She needed the info for the Annual Report. (David checked the minutes, and determined that while the Parks and Rec Committee was scheduled to meet with the Board on September 20th, the visit never took place. There was an informal visit at another time from one of the members who showed the Board the plans for the recreation field);

c. By laws—Joe said there would be nothing to present at the Special Town Meeting on March 18th;

d. David said he had just returned from a FRCOG Scenic Byway meeting in Ashfield and wanted to make his report an agenda item for the next PB meeting, on March 21st.

(3) Safety Complex—This item had been planned as the focus of this meeting, and so those department heads who have a direct relationship to the subject had been invited to engage with the members of the Board in a dialogue/brainstorming session about a safety complex. The departments were also represented by some of those who fulfill the emergency services as volunteers or paid employees.

From the outset of the discussion it was clear that the proposed garage, which has been designated for the Fournier property and for which preliminary plans already exist, should be separated as an issue from the safety complex, the need for which surfaced about six months ago, and for which there are possible sites and not plans.

That the garage should be separated from the safety complex was asserted by Bob Baker. He said that the three departments—police, fire, and ambulance—persons and equipment—needed to be located as near as possible to the center of town,

where men and women could activate equipment quickly after an emergency call was received. The garage site was too far from the center of town, and if the complex were built there, valuable time would be lost in getting people and vehicles activated. As for the garage itself, the site was not the best, but given the existence of the salt shed there, garage and shed belonged together.

From this point, the safety complex became the focus of the discussion, and the basic issues addressed:

a. fundamental considerations:

--that the building be located where drivers of the emergency vehicles, could see well down the road in both directions, so they can determine whether there are approaching cars or trucks;

-- that the apron in front of the complex enable the longest fire truck to sit in front, right-angled to the road, without its rear being inside the structure, nor its front jutting into the road;

-- that the site have a viable well and leech field system;

-- that there be single bays for each vehicle, long enough to provide space for storage of the materials for each separate vehicle; the fire department alone would require five bays, the other departments, one each. Total number of bays-- 8

--that the complex have as required by law separate public bathrooms for men and women, and a uni-sex shower;

--that there be separate offices for each of the three departments;

-- that the facility be on one floor , as a second story would require an elevator, which would be expensive;

b. site—it was suggested that there were only three possible sites that met the "Center -of -Town" criteria—existing Town garage property, Town-owned Shelburne Falls Road property, and the French property across from and somewhat west of the existing Town garage.

The discussion that followed addressed each of the sites, no one of them being ruled out as a possible site for the complex.

It was clear that renovation of the existing garage would be possible, but there are major issues to be considered—proximity to the river, need for well and leech field, and reorientation of the bays, so vehicles would not enter directly on Rt. 116. To enable this, the apron in front of the bays would have to be placed where the dirt parking lot is now located. The existing building would have to be redesigned so bays were re-oriented, a new washing bay created, and storage provided at the end of each of eight bays; three offices built, as well as bathrooms/ shower, etc.

As for the “Rose Property”, the complications connected with building the complex here would not be the building per se, for it would be built from scratch. But the vehicles would likely have to be housed in bays below the street level offices, where there would be a large apron/turnabout leading to an entrance on Shelburne Falls Road. The ramp up to the road would have to end short of the road in a flat area long enough so drivers of various sized vehicles could pause to see if cars or trucks were approaching. There would also be the matter of the citing of well and leech field. An additional consideration would be fumes and noise which could irritate residents living near the complex on Shelburne Falls Road, Main Street, and Baptist Hill Road.

The focus on the “Rose Property” as site for the complex also took into account the possibility that the building could house the municipal offices now found in a small building on Main Street. New offices would be at street level and be easily accessible. It was pointed out, however, that noise and fumes from the garage below would be a potential problem for those who worked day-long in these office. Also, that building codes would require there be an elevator, and stair access to and from the basement garage bays to the offices above. An elevator would be expensive.

The discussion moved to the regulatory issues that have to be taken into account in citing the complex on this property: wetland delineation, floodplain designation, a 200’ buffer boundary, and Natural Heritage endangered species sites. The focus on these issues was instigated by concerned residents who had come to this “Open Meeting” to listen and participate in the meeting.

For a number of these people, it seemed premature to talk about the “Rose Property” as a site for the complex until all environmental considerations had been addressed. Diane as Chair of the Planning board assured them that the Board was working to get all particulars about the environment determined professionally before the Board would even consider the site as a priority site for the complex. She said the Board had already contracted with Emily Stockman, a professional evaluator of wetlands, to do a wetlands assessment as soon as the snow melted, weather warms and plants begin to show themselves. Her report will follow.

The last site, the land opposite the existing garage, which is owned by Norm French, was given considerable attention by both the Board and the department heads. The site poses the fewest complications for building a complex from scratch, and is the most desirable when seen from the point of view of getting vehicles in motion as quickly as possible. That is not to say there aren’t complications: First, the land is privately owned, and second, most of it, on either side of the old industrial canal that runs from the covered bridge to the rear of one of the OWESCO storage buildings, is designated wetlands.

There were several decisions made, which while not formally voted, were the consensus of those present.:

First, the Board at its next meeting on the 21st, will take up the question of recommending to the Selectmen that they take action on getting the garage funded and built as soon as is practical.

Second, the Board asked Ken Ouimette and Bob Baker to provide a ball park figure for the square footage of a ground level, one- floor safety complex.

Third, the Board wants to see a wetlands assessment done on the French land, and will ask Emily Stockman to do this as well.

Fourth, the Board will invite Russ French to talk with the members on the 21st, the intention being to discuss all possible options by which he, as private owner of land, and the Town, which owns land across from his own, could make common cause.

The meeting ended at 8:45 pm. The next meeting of the Board will be on March 21st, 7:00 pm in the Town Office. Copies of these draft minutes will be sent to David Chichester and Heidi Flanders, who have been nominated as contenders for the seat on the Board, which will become vacant in May.

Respectfully submitted,

David Barten, clerk