

Draft minutes Planning Board meeting, March 21st, 2013

Present: Diane Poland (Chair), Joe Strzegowski (Vice-chair), Mike Kurkulonis, and David Barten. Absent: Kate Eugin-Moore (illness).

Also, present David Chichester (candidate for Planning Board's upcoming vacant seat), and by invitation Norm French, Russ French and Kate Van Cort.

The meeting began at 7:00. There were thirteen agenda items:

(1) Minutes—the minutes for the meeting of March 5th, focused on the Safety Complex, were unanimously accepted;

(2) Highway garage—the focus of this discussion was whether to recommend to the Select Board that the project of building the garage be given priority and the next stages of the process be pursued. These include finalizing the construction plans, and seeking the funds to build the garage, an estimated (very approximately) two million dollars.

It was unanimously agreed that because the site of the garage has been established and preliminary designs already drawn, the PB should formally recommend to the Select Board that the project be moved forward. Diane will make the recommendation to the Select Board.

Raising money, it is assumed by the members, will to some degree fall on the PB to pursue. The Select Board will have to determine what amount the Town can legally borrow, and the rest would have to be raised through seeking grants. Diane will discuss the financing with the Financial Committee and the Select Board.

It was suggested that FRCOG be asked whether grants are available. Mike thought there might be State funding available for the creation of a "model" garage.

(3) Safety Complex—Diane wanted the members to review the March 5th meeting, which was focused entirely on the Complex. It was unanimously agreed that it had been a productive meeting.

In the discussion that followed, it was mentioned that it was unlikely that the Town could build a garage and a Safety Complex at the same time, much less renovate the Town Hall—these three projects together cost upwards of eight million dollars, a cost that is likely beyond the borrowing limit placed on the Town by the State. But, it might be possible that the Safety Complex could be built five years from now, when the debt on the garage will be smaller.

Note was again made that once the new garage is completed and trucks, grader and pay loader removed to this new facility, the buildings now used jointly by the road crew and emergency services personnel would be used only by the latter group. The Town might consider directing money to improve the garage facility so as to better serve emergency services on a temporary basis.

(4) Master Plan— a week before this meeting, Sue had given each member, a copy of the revised plan. She asked that members read the draft through and again make comments, and return the plan to her by or at the meeting on the 21st. Diane, Joe and Mike had done so. David was late, but delivered his copy to her on the 22nd. It is not clear what Kate has done. Sue’s aim is to have a final draft completed and printed as soon as possible.

The consensus of those present was that Sue has created a very readable plan that is both optimistic about the future, and realistic about the challenges facing the town, given the prospect of a changing climate and uncertain global-national-regional-local economy. All these economies are linked together so as to affect Conway and other small towns. Her emphasis on “sustainability” therefore seems the right course into the future. It was noted that FRCOG is urging all towns in the County to think in terms of sustainability.

(5) Illuminated sign—this item was taken up later in the meeting.

(6) Conference—Joe and Diane had attended the Planning conference held in Worcester the previous weekend, and gave reports on the seminars they attended.

(7) Auxiliary members—A question had arisen as to whether the PB could appoint auxiliary members who would be able to take the place of an absent member. In support, it was mentioned that Mass. Law says Planning Boards can have five to nine members. Dave Chichester who had been Chair of the Board of Health said, “No”-- any change in the number of members on an elected Board would have to be voted by Town Meeting.

(8) Norm and Russ French, and Kate Van Cort—These residents had been invited to the meeting to discuss with the Board several issues in which both the Board and Norm and Russ French might have an interest. The Board was seeking to determine two things: First, if there is a site for a Safety Complex in Burkeville, and second, how the PB could aid Russ to expand his business, since this is not only in his interest but also the Town’s.

For a site, the PB has two options:

(a) Suggest that the Town renovate the existing garage structure, or tear down and build anew. Since the Town-owned parcel borders the South River, it is likely the building, grandfathered, could be renovated, but not built anew on the same site.

(b) If the PB thinks the Complex should be built from scratch in Burkeville, then it would have to be constructed on a site away from the river. The question was whether Norm French might have a parcel of his holdings in Burkeville that he would swap for the Town-owned parcel.

As for helping Russ expand his business, the PB also has several options:

(a) Try to get ConCom's designation of the old industrial canal that bisects the French holdings to the OESCO buildings altered so the entire canal or a portion could be filled in and a storage building built adjacent to the existing one.

(b) See if Russ would be interested in expanding his business to the Town-owned garage site directly across Rt. 116 from OESCO's own buildings.

The discussion was wide ranging. Russ described two failed attempts to get the Wetlands designation changed, and expressed skepticism about whether a third would be successful. He also said he did not want to expand operations directly across Route 116, for fear that his men and machinery would be at risk when moving materials and items to and from buildings, because of the on-going vehicle traffic passing the site from both directions. As for other places on French land where a safety complex might be sited, Russ said that almost all French land that borders Rt.116 on the south, Ives Road on the west, and Delabarre Avenue on the north is designated wetlands. So whether, the issue was expansion of Russ's business or siting of a complex on French land, any resolution depended on change of designation.

Diane spoke to the matter of designation by saying that the Board had asked Emily Stockman to do another analysis of the property, since she had done the previous one.

Also, it was noted that wetlands could be moved to a contiguous parcel of land that was not wetlands, one wetlands replacing the other. The cost for doing this is very high, since removal of plants and replanting them is labor-intensive. Russ's response was that the entire French property in question was designated wetlands, so there was no contiguous parcel on the property that was not wetlands in ConCom's view.

The discussion shifted to how a Safety complex might be built on land parcels in Burkeville owned by the Catholic Church and Austin (name?), who lives on the west corner where Ives and Delabarre intersect. He owns a parcel of land across the road from his home between Ives and the land owned by the Church. Neither of these parcels is designated wetland, and if both were linked together there possibly would be more than enough land on which to build a safety complex, which would have direct access to Rt. 116 via Ives Road.

After this idea surfaced, Mike recalled that Warwick Firemen's Association, a private organization, had recently built a safety complex and leased it to the town. The arrangement made it possible to build the structure at a much lower cost than the Municipality would have had to pay, avoiding in the process the reams of red tape that would have slowed construction. Mike asked whether Russ would be interested in building the complex and leasing it to the Town, if the parcels owned by Austin and the Church could be purchased and made one. Russ said he might be interested.

The members thought this possibility should be pursued, and since Joe belongs to the Church and has had a passing connection with Austin, he should see if there were any interest in selling these parcels of land. Joe agreed to do so.

Meanwhile, Emily Stockman will make her study when the spring is further along, and once this is done the Board will see if there is any wiggle room by which building expansion can be undertaken. One idea, directed to Dave Chichester, was whether the canal, usually filled with stagnant water in the warm months, wasn't a mosquito breeding ground, sufficiently large to be declared a hazard by the Board of Health, given the presence of the West Nile Virus in the area. Dave, no longer a member of the Board, declined to comment, but the members thought the matter might be taken up with the Board of Health, now chaired by Carl Nelke.

(9) Town-events sign—this item, no. 5 on the agenda, had been tabled to this point in the meeting.

Mike has often pointed out the need for a large sign, located directly on Rt.116, either in town or near the Grammar School, and desirably illuminated at night. This would improve markedly the way notices of importance, especially those for town meetings, could reach residents. Because a sizable percentage of Conway's residents are commuters who drive on the highway, a sign on Rt. 116, would likely lead to more residents attending meetings or other events mentioned on the sign.

Joe referred to the Protective Bylaws where signs are mentioned, and wondered whether an illuminated sign with moving imagery or letters wasn't in violation of the laws. Joe read what the Bylaws say, but there seemed uncertainty in the minds of the other members whether what Mike had in mind, that is illuminated letters, but no motion of letters or images, would be a violation.

Mike had researched the cost of creating such a sign at an earlier time, and presented two estimates, one for \$11, 854, plus \$500 to \$1,500 depending upon how foundation was built, and another for \$7,130.75 , plus \$500 to \$1,500. Both mountings would be for signs with remote control capabilities.

Mike had also presented a draft article for the Warrant for the May Annual Meeting.

It was generally agreed, though the members are now aware of the Bylaw regarding signs that there was need for a sign, and so the motion was made to place the Article as Mike had written it before the Town, requesting that it take \$17,000 from free cash and erect a "Remote Digital Led Bulletin Board ". A motion was made and seconded, and the vote being 4 to 0 in favor, the motion passed.

(**** Insert—On 3/25, David sent an e-mail to the members registering his concern about placement of the sign. He wrote, that if the proposed, permanent sign is within the State's right-of-way on Rt. 116, it is certain—based on the experience of the Conway Historic Commission-- that the Planning Board would have to seek permission from the DOT District Head-quarters, to erect it. If not within the right-of-way, then the Board should know how far the actual sign, whatever the location,

would be from the highway, and whether the sign would be as effective given the increased distance from the roadway.)

(10) Medical marijuana dispensary—Diane suggested that an article be placed on the Warrant for the May Meeting requesting a one-year moratorium on any attempt to found a medical marijuana dispensary, as allowed by State law, should a proposal be made to do so in Conway. The intent here would be to establish that should a proposal be made, the moratorium would go into effect, not before. The reason would give the Planning Board a full year from the point when a proposal was made to examine all related issues such as traffic problems, possible criminal activity, law enforcement, etc. and to make recommendations on how to deal with them. The suggestion will be taken up at the next PB meeting, on April 4th. April 18th, is the last day when articles for the Warrant can be submitted.

(11) Town report—Joe noted that last year, while the Planning Board's report was part of the Annual Report, the names of the members of the Board were not mentioned. It was agreed this should not happen this year, and so the matter will be taken up with Rick Bean, who is coordinating the creation of the Report.

(12) Website—Diane suggested that the Planning Board should have space on the Town's website, where the Board's activities are mentioned and minutes from its meetings are available. It was agreed this was a good idea. The question was: who managed the site? Since no one of the members knew, Diane said she would look into getting site space.

(13) Next meeting—Diane suggested and the members agreed that the next meeting on April 4th be a work session focused on bylaws, this being necessary preparation for the next session with Peggy Sloan, which will be on April 18th at 2:00 in the Town Office.

A motion was made and seconded to end the meeting, and the unanimous decision brought the meeting to an end at 8:45 pm. The next meeting of the PB will be April 4th, at 7:00 pm in the Town Office.

Respectfully submitted,

David Barten, clerk