

WATERTOWN PLANNING BOARD

DATE: October 8, 2014 PLACE: Town Council Chamber TIME: 7:00 PM COMMENCED: 7:05 PM

PURPOSE OF MEETING: Regular Monthly Meeting

PRESENT: John Hawes, Chairman; Jeff Brown; Fergal Brennock; Neal Corbett;
Linda Tuttle-Barletta
Steve Magoon, Director; Ingrid Marchesano, Clerk to the Planning Board;
Gideon Schreiber, Senior Planner; Andrea Adams, Senior Planner

ADMINISTRATION BUSINESS

Linda Tuttle-Barletta motioned to approve Minutes of 9/8/14.

Jeff Brown seconded the motion.

VOTE: 5-0 In favor

PENDING CASES

- 631, 651-653, 655 Mt. Auburn Street & 268 Arlington Street; Robert Korff, Agent, Coolidge Square II, LLC - Special Permit with Site Plan Review

John Hawes asked for a motion to continue this project until the Planning Board's meeting in November.

Jeff Brown motioned to continue the above petition.

Fergal Brennock seconded the motion.

VOTE: 5-0 In favor

CONTINUED HEARING – TEXT AMENDMENT

- ***Pleasant Street Corridor District***

John Hawes, the only item on the Agenda tonight is the continued hearing for the Pleasant Street Corridor District text amendment which is one of three activities going on in Watertown that deal with zoning - Comprehensive Plan, Design Standards and Guidelines effort, and the Pleasant Street Corridor District Text Amendment. The last 2 chapters of the Comprehensive Plan will be discussed at the Town Council/Planning Board meeting tomorrow night. The Design Standards meeting would be held October 15, 2014 at the Middle School Auditorium. We will focus on things unique to Pleasant Street corridor tonight. Some issues will also be related to the Comprehensive Plan.

Incorporate sub-districts within the Pleasant Street Corridor District to define two new areas where a commercial component is required in new development and another where new development would not allow residential. The language would also modify the build-to-line, clarify the maximum façade length, and require further step-backs for buildings. The amendments would also update the Table of Uses and Notes to the Table of Uses to reflect the new zoning. The amendment also includes a zoning map with the new districts (PSCD-1, PSCD-2, & PSCD-3) – See attached document

Steve Magoon, provided an overview of the history to date. We want feedback from the public. Last spring the Town Council had suggested DCDP staff prepare amendments to the Corridor District. Changes were focused on views and impacts/access to the Charles River, setbacks and step-backs, 10-foot build to line not appropriate, impacts on façade, impacts on neighborhoods without step-backs. We have heard from community members, property owners, and developers. Public meetings with community members and property owners were held. We have discussed proposed amendments with the Design Consultant. Comprehensive Plan will involve a number of implementation steps, some of which will make changes to zoning.

Gideon Schreiber, the proposed amendment language includes changes since the last hearing. A colored map of the proposed PSCD-1, PSCD-2 and PSCD-3 has been created. Change is proposed to existing single family parcel on the Eastern edge of the District that is shown in yellow. Setbacks and step-backs have been modified and 15 foot step-back language is amended. We seek to encourage pitched roofs. The graphic is showing the flat roof and pitched roof proposal. The height requirements have not changed. In set-backs component, new language was added to apply to all walls. The maximum façade length decreased. Variations on facades over 100 feet in length will be dealt with by Design Guidelines. Build-to Line setback allowed is to be amended. A language has been added to account for front porches and stoops, clarifying language for corner lots. New section dealing with transition areas/buffer zones has been added. Roof height limitations are incorporated into the step-backs. In many cases it is related to requirements in the T-zone, it deals with narrow lots and with the issue of parking for narrow lots. Table of Uses has been modified and the Table clarified. Projects up to 33 feet in height could be approved by Site Plan Review conducted by the Planning Board. Staff report provides a summary of public comments received during the work sessions. The proposed façade length is 250 feet, anything over 100 feet will require design treatment.

Jeff Brown, map indicates PSCD-3 is commercial. This is not advisable. We hope to retain ownership on the last remaining part of the green space along the Charles River. Not getting this area as open space is a missed opportunity.

Gideon Schreiber, that language is specifically for publicly-owned land. DCR has an easement for the Blue Heron Bridge. We cannot impose open space zoning on private property. DCR's plan is to make a connection where there is none now, because the land is in private hands.

Steve Magoon, areas on the map that are green are owned by the Town or DCR.

John Hawes, the real issue is the change from commercial to mixed use, and of restricting the amount of residential.

Fergal Brennock, the current map shows different district, limited redevelopment district?

Steve Magoon, not allowing that much of residential use is based on a desire to have a balanced mix. We could look at whether it makes sense to not going that much into residential or commercial. We are looking for a balance. We are not writing off the land along the River.

Kenneth Woodland, District D Council Member, stated that he's been in contact with the neighborhood. A section should remain 100% commercial to compensate for other areas changing to residential. The idea was for mixed use development, not 100% residential. We need amenities for people currently living in the area. We have had 6+ meetings since May 2014. We want that area to remain commercial.

David Ferris, Zoning Board of Appeals Member, good that there is much deliberation and public comments. I don't know that it's essential that residential use must occur there. People can live on one side of Pleasant Street, and cross the street to go to shop, etc. Retail and work space mixed in on the same piece of property. A control of the land along the Charles River would be beneficial. I hope that we maintain the intervening area as open space. Seven stories on the River may be overwhelming.

Colleen Sexton, lives at 193 Pleasant Street. The map is showing three purple properties and one yellow property. All three properties are residential, the neighbor wants to change his property to two family. Why consider these parcels part of the PSCD?

John Hawes, these parcels should not have been part of the PSCD.

Steve Magoon, request came in reference to the one parcel that would like to change to Two Family. One issue that this creates is that 192 Pleasant Street, a brand new building, becomes non-conforming. Gideon Schreiber, these three parcels were always industrial. 192 Pleasant also involved the cleanup of a contaminated site. Developer put a lot of effort into seven units that got approved under the PSCD. Majority of the land was developed under the PSCD and conforms to it. Two parcels have maintained Two-families. These were also in the conservation control zone.

Vincent Piccirilli, District C Councilor, there are actually four parcels involved. They are in the PSCD now, one is a single family house, next is 192 Pleasant Street/7-unit condo, and two are two-family houses. I do understand the industrial properties but the narrow section speaks more to residential than industrial, it does not seem to fit in. Two parcels to the West with the two-family homes – make sense to include them. Lots are not conforming to the PSCD. Minimum lot size is 10,000 square feet. Impact on 192 Pleasant Street is likely minimal. I suggest the block of 4 parcels should be re-zoned to Two-family.

John Hawes, we should discuss to exclude these parcels from the PSCD as a way of dealing with this issue. The point is that this should go into the overall potential rezoning, there is no urgency here to make these changes.

Steve Magoon, I suggest that if the Board feels they should be removed from the PSCD, then take steps to do that. One property owner is anxious for this change. We could also include the adjoining three parcels. DCDP staff could also do some additional outreach to the other property owners. Change could also be made at the time of the Town Council review, which would allow time for outreach to property owners.

John Hawes, I don't like the idea of making a change to the zoning without the property owners being present.

John McDonald, Field Companies, owner of multiple parcels on Pleasant Street. The area was rezoned in 2007 and became predominately residential. Why do we need such a radical swing as no residential in PSCD-3? Let's see what the market will bear, we should be looking at the best use of the properties.

Tony Palomba, Councilor at Large, I have questions about other changes on the proposed PSCD map. What made this a good break?

Steve Magoon, the proposed change goes from almost Bridge Street to almost Green River Way. This change would include various businesses, mostly automotive repair. There is a potential for redevelopment and a wider range of potential uses. The other issue is the relationship to the historic buildings across the street. Southern side of Pleasant Street has not changed to partially protect those historic mills. We need to keep commercial to maintain an appropriate mix in the Town's tax base. Residential plus commercial means the commercial space will likely become retail. We want to keep part of the tax base as office and industrial.

Gideon Schreiber, parcels to the West are not that shape anymore. Parcel data has not caught up to the Assessor's information. The properties to the West include a parking lot and a pad site for sale. It looks like small parcels, but they really are one large parcel and remnants of the rail corridor. Keep the successful commercial component of the District.

Maryanne Milligan, 23 Falmouth Road, thanked her Councilors, having given time to several meetings. This is a follow up of several years of discussion. Many of the goals have not been met, any adjustments should be made now. Waltham has allowed construction of large residential units on the border with

Watertown. Its time to re-base the Corridor Plan. I agree that Watertown needs to think about the future, needs to keep the intent of the original plan which was mixed use.

Gideon Schreiber, approximately 600 to 850 residential units have been built along the corridor.

Jeff Brown, it's important to consider what Waltham is doing, it will influence uses in Watertown along the PSCD corridor.

Barbara Ruskin, Spring Street, I compliment the DCDP staff and the Planning Board for taking on the challenge of zoning re-write. Why is the Board discussing PSCD-3? Are we worried about too much housing? We should not deny residences along the Charles River, it is not a good idea to prohibit housing on the far left hand corner of the District. We need connectivity between parcels and uses. I am worried about the canonization of the Charles River if large facades are placed on the River front. The concepts of frontage limitation and transparency need to be included in the commercial zones. We need to place emphasis on creation of streets and neighborhoods.

Aaron Dushku, Councilor at Large, the purple piece on the Charles River might be the last potential piece directly on the Charles River where a river-front restaurant might be developed. Everyone has been responsive on residential set-backs and step-backs. We still need to think how to divide up the District in terms of commercial area versus areas where there would be mixed use. Key issue is controlling the size of the buildings, buildings tend to be too large/tall. Make the larger lots into several buildings. Make the 250 foot maximum building wall smaller. Break up the massing of the building. The Design Guidelines need to be in place if the wall is over 100 feet. There is not a strong enough emphasis on variation in the façade. We need to correct the formatting for this particular dimensional requirement for long walls. It should apply to all building facades. See page 3 of 9; Appears to only apply to side yard setbacks. Why was the particular number (250 feet) was selected as the limit?

Steve Magoon, PSCD staff can make this adjustment. The limitation on a maximum length/size of a building should apply to all building facades. We will revise the numbers to make it clearer than the old definition.

Cindy Nelson, 193 Pleasant Street, we have purchased the condo because it is in a light industrial area. We need commercial space, these businesses generally have adequate parking. Traffic has increased significantly with the new residential projects. Employees at some commercial businesses will go home at night, and not add to area traffic.

Ian Clarke, 18 Falmouth Road, I have been watching the PSCD changes. I am in support of the changes. We are interested in putting the brakes on development along the Corridor. There is too much residential, we cannot just let market forces prevail. This is an opportunity to reduce the overall amount of residential development and to maintain the current mix. Buildings are harder to change than the Zoning Map, they stay in place for 50+ years. We need to bring the Corridor back to the original intent.

Joan Gumbleton, 47 Waltham Street, we appreciate all the hard work, traffic is a concern. We understand development must come, but we need to control it. The parcel near the billboard is very narrow block of land. Proposals for the site are in the works, we would like to see potential units as condos. Condo owners tend to take better care of their units. I am not a fan of the Riverbend look, as the building is 200+ feet long. We need to avoid overbuilding that area. The traffic is bad at Rosedale, Pleasant Street and Waltham Street intersection, we cannot make turning movements in a decent interval of time. The intersection should be moved away from the corner.

John Hawes, the objective of the proposed change is good, what is the logic behind the parcelization. Some of the development on the East end has underutilized parcels. There are issues of transition to the existing development, Repton and Alta at the Estates. I do not see provisions dealing with transitions, it may need to be part of a more careful study. Arsenal Street is now receiving development pressure, many of these things will be in the Comprehensive Plan or Design Guidelines.

Ken Woodland, the Council came to the consensus that this process should go forward before the Comprehensive Plan, it started before the Comprehensive Plan, the ideas started at least 3 years ago, and these are not brand new issues. The Corridor is special in that it's already gone through a study. We need to look at the zoning and determine if it still fits the PSCD. I do not think that a zoning change needs to wait for the Comprehensive Plan.

....., 9 Sunnybank Road, I visit Russo's a lot. With the current development, people only see large buildings along Charles River. We need to build villages and control the development of large buildings. We need streets that bring you to the Charles River and provide views to the water.

John Hawes, we need to control the density on the properties. Large lots create large developments. We need developments to be broken down into smaller blocks.

David Ferris, I congratulate everyone for wrestling with these issues. People react to developments such as Riverbend. The building is five stories tall, the proposed amendments would allow buildings two stories taller (7 stories). We need to think about the long views or vistas down the Corridor. A seven story building will be a massive block on the street. PSCD-3 – Perhaps limit residential component to only 50%. Transportation impacts – not sure if a 7-story office building has lesser impacts than a similarly sized residential project.

Aaron Dushku, Councilor, I agree with Mr. Ferris, we need to look at the bigger picture. I am cognizant of the impact on the tax base. We need more variability in different zones. We recognize that Arsenal Street has been a hot topic in terms of development. We are on the verge of properties being redeveloped in the PSCD.

John Hawes, we need to discuss dimensional criteria, FAR has changed, we should discuss lowering the FAR and clarify step-backs and set-backs with the diagrams.

Steve Magoon, it is true that the PSCD allows buildings up to seven stories, but with the lowering of the FAR from 2.0 to 1.5 it is unlikely that a building could achieve 7 stories.

Jeff Brown, it is a mistake to limit building heights at the street to no more than 26 feet. That height limits all sorts of dimensions. We must get to at least 3 stories, and then begin to set back. New development in Harvard Square is illustrative. 2 stories make the design of the façade difficult, 3 stories or 35 feet is typical of residential scale buildings. I cannot imagine a street corridor in the area with these limitations.

David Ferris, I agree with Mr. Brown, if residential is part of this design, it is natural that the developer would want to include a balcony. We need to include that type of design.

Colleen Sexton, if seven stories is too tall, let's say that and not just rely on the FAR to control this. Perhaps nothing in the corridor should be taller than Riverbend.

John Hawes, the issue with 7 stories is to allow some flexibility on the larger lots. Unfortunately, the whole PSCD is intertwined. The size of the development only occurred in reality when developers built to the zoning in place. Riverbend is a reflection of the Ordinance. In this vein, I suggest that residential

should be 20 feet back from the street edge, while active retail, however, should only be 10 feet back from the street. The point is that all of these are inter-related.

Vincent Piccirilli, the two story maximum before the step-back makes sense for a 5-story building but not for a 3-story building. Otis Building in Watertown Square is an example. In terms of what the desire for the street-scape, there may be a mix of heights. Limiting development to just two stories is to limiting. I understand the need for setbacks and step-backs. The Town Council was looking at large parcels when the 7-story limit was put into zoning. Now those larger parcels, such as the one that became Alta at the Estate, have been developed. We need to think about incentives. Allow 3 stories as of right. Incentives activate when the proposal increases to 5 stories. I don't really want to impose constraints. Streets with a vibe to them have shops right at the road edge. We need to have a mix of building heights and uses. This was the vision, proposed changes are getting close to this original vision. Setback and height issues should be carefully thought through in terms of what would get built. We need more exceptions to take account of varied parcel sizes, including the narrow lots that were part of the old railroad right of way. Perhaps two different sets of rules are needed. Town Council needs more guidance from the Planning Board, particularly in terms of design, so that the result is something the community wants.

Jason Cohen, 153 Common Street, I am concerned about the FAR and heights. It is hard to imagine that buildings would be as tall as the zoning would allow with the proposed FAR because it would create very narrow buildings. It seems there is a disconnect between these two zoning provisions.

Jeff Brown, no matter how the Guidelines are created, or what is By Right, the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals still should have some discretion. The Guidelines effort should or will apply to the PSCD. The Comprehensive Plan is almost complete.

John Hawes, I agree with Mr. Brown. I am concerned about some aspects of setback, such as averaging from the street. I agree that this effort on the PSCD amendment should perhaps wait until the Design Standards/Guidelines effort and Comprehensive Plan are complete.

Neil Corbett, are there development opportunities pending on the resolution of the PSCD amendments?

Steve Magoon, absolutely, yes. There are at least 2-3 projects under option. These developers are anxiously awaiting the outcome of the PSCD amendment. DCDP staff has received good feedback and can make amendments. There are implications for the projects that are waiting if this effort is put off until the Design Standards/Guidelines and the Comprehensive Plan are completed.

...., I am concerned about the potential changes to building height. How do these changes fit in to the overall scheme of the zoning amendment? There is a reason why the amendments came forward. Do we need the changes in place before the new developments occur? If the Comprehensive Plan and the Design Standards/Guidelines are not completed in the near future, the need to continue with the proposed PSCD amendments to address concerns in the corridor. Pending developments should not be made to wait. We need to put some level of breaks without a moratorium, rebase and retool. Amendment is to address the unique needs of the Corridor.

Gideon Schreiber, some design features would occur in the 60 or 62 foot height, based on podium parking, it may allow better screening. Repton looks the way it does because it has a 50 foot height cap, prior to the PSCD. This is the timeline for Design Guidelines/Standards - First meeting is next Wednesday. This process has started, the Consultant was hired. There are two pieces to the amendment: Zoning Map change and creation of sub-districts. We have still tried to mesh the PSCD Amendment with the Design Standards/Guidelines work by references to the Guidelines and Standards in the proposed Text Amendment.

Steve Magoon, next Comprehensive Plan workshop is scheduled for October 9, 2014. Hope that this may be the last work session. Finalize language and bring back to the Planning Board and the Town Council for adoption in the next several months.

Dave Ferris, the regulations as they exist now would allow a building on Pleasant Street that was primarily parking garage. I would hope that the Design Standards and Guidelines would address this.

Barbara Ruskin, Design Consultant was hired to stave off the possibility of a moratorium. Every development should be included in this process. Don't allow any project to go forward without a comprehensive design review of the corridor. Get beyond the idea that abutters are the only ones affected by what goes on in Watertown.

Steve Magoon, tonight is a hearing for the PSCD. Amendments have staved off development, this created a defacto moratorium. Hope to wrap up the Design Standards and Guidelines by the end of the year. Even if a project came in today and demanded to be heard, they would probably not be before the Planning Board before then anyway. Not talking about projects "charging ahead" in the PSCD or ahead of these efforts. Implementation of the Comprehensive Plan is a longer term project.

John Hawes, closed the Public Hearing to allow the Board to discuss some issues.

John Hawes, a key question is the proposed Text Amendment, strategically something that the Planning Board should continue to work on. Can we change the Text Amendment as a short term strategy and revisit it as needed later, when the Design Standards and Guidelines and the Comprehensive Plan are completed and adopted?

Steve Magoon, the Planning Board should not wait for adoption of the Comprehensive Plan. That Plan is a key document and addresses all of Watertown. The implementation of the Plan will take some time. The Text Amendment is on a separate track. Design Standards and Guidelines are on a shorter timeframe. These can be crafted to takes into account Ordinance language, or supersede it as needed. I suggest to continue tonight's hearing. This would allow DCDP staff to adjust the language.

John Hawes, the option is to continue the hearing on the PSCD. It will give the Board more time to look at the proposed changes.

Neil Corbett questioned whether a continuance would negatively impact potential projects?

Steve Magoon, as long as the process moves forward it would not impact potential projects.

Linda Tuttle-Barletta, in an ideal world, the related documents would all come together at the same time. We understand the impacts, we need to keep the efforts moving forward.

John Hawes, the PSCD Amendment is important to this end of Watertown. If just passed, then would want it looked at again as part of the Comprehensive Plan. I am not sure if this should be on the next Agenda, based on projects on that Agenda.

Linda-Tuttle Barletta motioned to continue the PSCD Text Amendment and public hearing to the next meeting of the Planning Board.

Jeff Brown seconded the motion.

Vote: 5-0 In Favor.

John Hawes adjourned the meeting at 9:00 PM.

MEETING ADJOURNED: 9:00 PM

MINUTES APPROVED: _____

For more detailed Minutes see tape dated 10/8/14 available in the DCDP office.