

Historic District Commission
Town Hall, Room 121
Meeting Minutes, 24 May 2016

Meeting called to order at 7:32 PM. Members attending: Anita Rogers (AR), Fran Arsenault (FA), Ron Regan (RR), David Honn (DH); Chingsung Chang (CC, Selectmen Representative)
Other attending: Acton Land Use Director, Matthew Selby (MS); Tom Peterman; Scott Kutil(SK); Terra Freidrichs (TF)
Not present: David Shoemaker

7:30 PM The entire meeting agenda will be a discussion of the writing of an RFP for, and the job description of, a consultant funded for the HDC by the CPC with a goal of implementing zoning changes to protect the districts.

DH explains: In Jan 2016 the HDC made an application to the CPC for \$33,000 to fund the hiring of a consultant to help with possible zoning changes to help support the preservation of the Districts. The goal was to find “a consultant with zoning and preservation experience to help us refine our procedures and prepare some warrant articles that change zoning to better preserve the districts”.

The HDC has inventory sheets and Scott Kutil’s exhaustive and objective zoning study to serve as a basis for the work. Other goals might be to catalogue buildings and describe settings as a guideline for new construction that meets the goal of a sense of place with individual properties. Education and community outreach would be a necessary goal and the signage program should be continued also. Development pressures make it clear that hammerhead lots, subdivisions and condos can allow for inconsistent development within the districts.

The goal of the CPC funded study would be to provide the text for zoning overlays in each district that:

- 1- provide a foundation for the decisions
- 2- preserve and enhance the town’s character per the 2020 study recommendations.

A memo from Roland Bartl in May 2013 called for more rigor in the HDC decision-making with “detailed design principles, and consistent denials based on principles with details”.

Scott Kutil's zoning study includes all properties in the districts and all their zoning parameters: setbacks, FAR, open space etc. An actual FAR was calculated for each property using the size of the lot and the size of the home available from assessor's data to show actual patterns vs. the zoning bylaw.

West Acton zoning

R2 zone, Village Residential (Windsor Ave) and Commercial zoning on Mass Ave.

SK and the Windsor Ave neighbors signed a petition to request a building moratorium in 2013. Two developers were affected. One dropped his plan and one plan was rejected by zoning. SK argued to selectmen and planning that the zoning allows inconsistent development in the districts. Especially in certain areas the zoning code allows development that is not "consistent" with existing patterns of the districts.

Existing FAR in all 3 districts is about .25.

SK has a memorandum that describes what the zoning overlays could be. The term "overlay" is used to further define a zone, though it may not be the right approach in this instance. Re-zoning might be a better way to accomplish the changes and create a Historic District Zone.

TF - should South Acton be mostly geared toward residential or should it be mixed use?

SK – hammerhead lots might be precluded by lot width parameters

MS- at under \$35,000 you don't have to do an RFP. You do have to solicit 3 written or oral quotes. This is an RFP for consulting services. RFP needs to include

- 1- a description of the project
- 2- describe the needed consultant 's qualifications
- 3- describe other relevant work (this might require a team for services i.e. architecture and zoning)
- 4- Describe scope and deliverables.

Consultant's other obligations:

Required - 1 public hearing with the planning board.

Recommended – 1 public meeting at least a month before the hearing.

Maybe – a 3rd meeting for speaking at town meeting

The Planning Board would need to be on board before the consultant begins.

If the Planning Board does not support it and it fails at Town meeting you can't bring it to Town meeting again for 2 years. If the Planning Board supports it and it fails, you can come back to Town meeting again the next year.

Consultants efforts needed to prepare the warrant article.

SK – 1990 Historic Districts created were mostly R-2

1994 Village Residential district was changed to allow more dense zoning.

Was not done with an eye toward preservation but to increase the density of development.

Uniformly in all the districts the actual open space is 75%

Today in those zoning districts open space requirements vary from 35% to 0%.

Summary

Zoning is the most important emphasis for this study

Graphic representation of possibilities and limits will be important.

Meet with planning before writing the RFP

Write a draft RFP and meet with planning again

RFP should focus on the outcome and let the consultant prescribe the best solutions.

To what extent can the HDC use its own bylaw to encourage appropriate development in the districts?

The consultant's deadline would be the end of 2016 – consistent with the end of public outreach.

10:45 Move to adjourn; seconded and voted unanimously