

TOWN OF WESTFORD
PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES
Minutes for September 1, 2010 Meeting
Approved on December 1, 2010

Commission Members Present: Mark Letorney (Chair), Patrick Haller, and Seth Jensen

Commission Members Absent: Gordon Gebauer and Jason Hoover.

Also Present: Melissa Manka (Planning Coordinator).

The meeting began at approximately 7:05 p.m.

Town Center Revitalization Project

The Planning Commission decided to wait until they know whether they were awarded grant funds to hire Smart Growth Vermont prior to pursuing this project further.

Draft Steep Slope Regulations

The Planning Commission briefly discussed the draft steep slope language and decided to hold a public hearing on the draft regulations on November 3rd, 2010.

Permitted & Conditional Uses & Definitions

The Planning Commission discussed the possibility of integrating form based zoning regulations into the zoning regulations.

Mark said form based zoning would allow some much needed flexibility in permitting conditional and permitted uses. He said he likes the idea of focusing on a business's impact to the neighborhood and community as opposed to the specific details of the business, Melissa informed the group that VPR recently did a program on form based zoning, Newport has published draft form based zoning regulations and there are seminars on the subject in late September. She encouraged Commissioners to research form based zoning prior to the next meeting.

The Commission agreed that it would be beneficial to meet with business owners throughout town to determine whether they would like to expand their businesses and, if so, how they would like to do so with the intent to understand where they see barriers in our current regulations to their future business plans.

The Commission agreed that architectural standards would need to be involved in this change.

Seth said form based zoning sounds better than design review.

Mark said the Commission should work on defining different types of uses at the next meeting.

Melissa said she has given the Commission a list of uses currently allowed in the zoning regulations and their definitions.

Pat suggested Commissioners think about uses conceptually as opposed to the specifics of a business.

Affordable/Fair Housing Regulations

Seth said he would like to see affordable housing density determined by lot coverage as opposed to units per acre. He said this would be most appropriate in the Town Common, Town Village, Town Center and possibly Rural Residential Zoning Districts. The Commission was agreeable to this idea and said it should be discussed with Smart Growth Vermont.

Next, the Commission went through the CCRPC's Fair Housing Report.

Variety of Lot Sizes – The Commission agreed that reducing the minimum lot size to ½ acre in the town's growth area (Town Common & Town Village Districts) was an improvement. Also, they agreed that adding language to allow affordable housing density to be determined by lot coverage as opposed to acreage requirements would be an improvement too.

Inclusionary Zoning – The Planning Commission agreed the Town has voluntary inclusionary zoning since the subdivision regulations grant density bonuses for affordable housing.

Reduced Fees – Until recently Westford tax payers were bearing the cost of development/permitting in town (i.e. the town was subsidizing development). The town has decided to wait and see what the impacts of newly adopted fees are to ensure the town's expenses are being covered prior to revisiting fee reductions for affordable housing. The Commission also agreed that they would be more inclined to propose an affordable housing fee reduction for impact fees, if imposed.

Single Family Dwelling Definition – The Commission disagrees that the definition of single family dwelling excludes mobile homes by not including the term in the definition. The current definition is all encompassing and does not segregate mobile homes from stick build or modular homes, but rather states a single family dwelling is a dwelling unit occupied by one family. This is an all encompassing definition and does not prohibit mobile homes.

Planning Commission Work Plan

Melissa will revise the work plan based on decisions made at the meeting.

Minutes of the July 7, 2010 Meeting

Seth MOVED approve the minutes.

Pat SECONDED the motion.

The motion PASSED: 3 – 0.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:45 p.m.

Submitted by,
Melissa Manka, Planning Coordinator