

TOWN OF LINCOLN
MINUTES OF THE PLANNING BOARD
MARCH 4, 2020
TOWN OFFICES

PRESENT: Margaret Olson (Chair), Lynn DeLisi (Vice-Chair), Gary Taylor, Stephen Gladstone

STAFF: Paula Vaughn-MacKenzie

7:00 PM South Lincoln Village District Discussion on future engagement outreach and policy

This was a meeting posted by the Planning Board and SLPIC, a subcommittee of the Planning Board. Although the SLPIC committee did not have a quorum present, the Planning Board did have a quorum and the Planning Board proceeded with the meeting.

GT gave an update regarding the process so far regarding the South Lincoln Village District Zoning. GT noted that there has been a lot of discussion and feedback from public forums and other public meetings. Concerns have been raised regarding traffic, density and other impacts. All concerns should be considered and responded to. He noted that there have been ongoing discussions with the development community regarding the feasibility of mixed-use projects. He noted that increasing the requirements of a project such as including affordable housing, green energy, commercial space, public amenities, and high-level design contribute to making a project expensive.

Any redevelopment of the Lincoln Station Mall requires septic capacity. The Community Builders currently owns the package treatment plant that services both Lincoln Woods and the Mall. Any development would require an increase in septic capacity of the package treatment plant. If the Community Builders becomes a partner in a project at the Mall, then there would not be enough capacity for any expansion at Lincoln Woods.

There has also been feedback that the proposed zoning would be giving the Planning Board jurisdiction to approve a project in the Village Center rather than Town Meeting. GT noted that the RLF is not comfortable going through the Town Meeting process because they would need a partner to redevelop the Mall. The time and up-front expense to bring a project through Town Meeting as well as the uncertainty of passing are major obstacles. That is why no project has been brought through the Town Meeting process under the South Lincoln Overlay District.

In order to make people more comfortable with the zoning there are options being considered such as a circuit breaker that would require further approval from Town Meeting after a certain number of units are approved under the new zoning. Another option is to narrow the scope of the zoning to just the Mall side and the businesses across Lincoln Road but leaving out the residences. A final thought is to require either the BOS or the Housing Commission to support any project within the Village District as a condition to Planning Board approval.

GT explained that the goals of the Village District Zoning are not new. They have been consistent in decades of studies done by the Town. He also noted that a Planning Board Report of 1971 included a "Letter to Our Grandchildren" which outlined the same challenges of diversity of housing that Lincoln faces today. Although these are not new proposals, it is still a tough decision for the Town. He encouraged everyone to read the letter and to continue to be involved.

MO suggested that a Request for Ideas for the redevelopment of the Mall may give the Town a reality check on what is feasible there and whether the proposed zoning is the vehicle to get us there. She noted that as we try to get to "yes" on the zoning, we are being asked to lower the density, include net zero, include affordable housing, include great design etc. There needs to be a compromise and an understanding of what can and cannot be done in the real world. Historically, the Lincoln public process tries to accommodate all views. People who are opposed are the most vocal. We need a way to get all voices in the room. The messaging needs to focus on a walkable, viable village center. In order to accomplish this, we need to change what is there. The Town will be faced with tradeoffs. Without some sort of visualization, it will be hard to make a decision.

The Planning Board and SLPIC will need to look at what adjustments can be made to the zoning. The concept of housing density around the MBTA station will increase the viability of the center. Diversity in housing will help people who want to downsize and others looking for alternative forms of housing. MO noted that it is a big change for Lincoln.

GT and LD thought the Planning Board should give an update at Town Meeting. Because the zoning article is no longer on the warrant, the Board can hold out the Planning Budget and make a short presentation. GT will work on the slide presentation and the PB will invite SLPIC to the 3/24 meeting to review the slides.

The Planning Board also discussed having a developer panel discussion in either June or September for residents to hear the process from a developer's viewpoint.

Jane Herlacher suggested that the Board explain why the overlay process did not work. She thought that people would like to know what makes it so difficult under the current zoning. Why has no one submitted a project under the South Lincoln Overlay District.

A resident of the Ridge Court Condominium said that she was afraid the condominiums would be re-developed and she would lose her rental and be forced to move.

MO noted that change is difficult. The zoning is not a project. Only an owner of a property can apply for a special permit for a particular project. There is nothing preventing the owner of the Ridge Court Condominiums from redeveloping the property now.

Jessica Packineau stated that renters are most affected. There are 200 families in Lincoln Woods and the Flying Nuns. She also stated that if the focus was on redeveloping the Mall, then she thinks there would be support.

Sara Mattes stated that if it is really about the RLF, then the Town should help solve their problem and redevelopment would be supported. She also noted that if the Town put a parking deck on the commuter lot, it would pull people off Route 2 and put them on the train. She thought the Board should present zoning that is specific for the RLF.

GT noted that the zoning could start on one side. MO noted that there would need to be a resolution to the temporary loss of housing stock for residents concerned with losing their place to live. MO noted that the goals are to address the entire area. A transit-oriented development includes housing near the train. Including the entire area is a more holistic approach. The zoning included the RLF, diversity of housing and the MBTA in order to address all the issues. The zoning may be complicated, but it is better planning. MO suggested that the Board address each goal and explain how we landed on this proposal.

GT noted that housing is part of the equation as the Town has housing needs.

Geoff McGean noted that the RLF is interested in redevelopment. It is very difficult to support the retail. In order to support the retail, they need more customers. Additionally, the RLF is unable to redevelop on their own and will need a partner.

Adam Stark noted that he is new to Lincoln but wanted to share the experience in West Concord where the best of intentions did not lead to the expected result. He noted that small businesses were replaced by larger ones. He agreed that it would be better to have diverse housing close to the train.

MO noted that the zoning is not final and that it is not going to the Town Meeting this spring. The process will drive the zoning rather than the zoning driving the process.

Tim Higgins noted that with 25 years of experience, he knows that the Town will not proceed until there is consensus around the vision of the Village Center. The Zoning is complicated. The BOS has confidence that the Planning Board will build consensus through the public engagement process. Zoning is a means to an end and the conversation is still ongoing about what the vision is. From the 1970's forward there has been consistent themes of what the Village Center should be. The difficulty is in gauging the tradeoffs.

MO agreed and noted that it may not be economically viable to achieve all of the goals. The Town will need to decide what they are willing to sacrifice. The effort should continue until we succeed. MO also noted that a viable and walkable village center means different things to different people.

Sara Mattes noted that Lincoln should go its own way and leave the dense housing in Newton.

LD suggested that the SLPIC committee be reorganized. The Planning Board will review the membership considering the work of the committee in the last two years.

SG made a motion to adjourn. LD Seconded. Passed 4-0.

Approved April 28, 2020