

MINUTES OF SLPAC

March 4, 2022

ZOOM MEETING

SLPAC MEMBERS PRESENT: Gary Taylor (Chair), Rachel Drew, Margaret Olson, James Craig

STAFF: Paula Vaughn-MacKenzie, Jennifer Curtin

7:30 AM Discussion of response letter re: Housing Choice Act Guidelines. Vote expected.

PVM distributed the latest draft that the Select Board and Housing Commission have voted to approve and sign. The Planning Board will review on March 8th and the Conservation Commission will review on March 9th.

MO said that Bob Domnitz added some substantive changes to the letter that was approved. She asked if there should be substantive edits after a vote.

JC said that the draft has been out for a while and every board should not be making substantial changes to the documents.

PVM went through the edits proposed by Mr. Domnitz.

Mr. Domnitz asked if DHCD has clarified that there is credit for multi-family already in existence.

MO said it is not about housing production, it is about zoning. If we zone an area that already has multifamily in place, it counts towards the requirements and avoids the worry about housing production being done in the future. If we had 15 units per acre existing already, we could zone these areas without having to zone a new area that does not have existing compliant housing stock.

Mr. Domnitz said that the guidelines are going beyond the legislation by saying that the State can consider compliance with Housing Choice for other discretionary grants beyond those which the legislation states.

GT said that they can consider any criteria they wish because they have discretionary authority awarding grants.

PVM said that the Massachusetts Municipal Lawyers Association is aware of this point and will contest this section of the guidelines. She added that there are many issues and inconsistencies within the guidelines and the Town will also be challenging its designation as a Bus Community.

No substantive changes were made.

JC moved to approve the draft subject to the minor changes that have been discussed and addition of the maps. MO seconded. Roll Call: GT aye, JC aye, MO aye, RD aye.

Discussion of parameters of zoning in South Lincoln

PVM circulated the most recent draft of the zoning language dated January 24, 2020. She added that the Ridge Road Condominiums, and the Ridge Court condominiums (the Flying Nuns) have been removed from the rezoning area. The new zoning seeks to replace the B1 and B2 districts with a South Lincoln zoning district with two subareas: village residential sub area and business sub area.

GT said that the Rural Land Foundation's (RLF) intention to go through the Overlay process changes the conversation, since their original apprehension to going through the overlay to develop the mall was a large part of the need for zoning changes. He added that the RLF is considering mixed-use development to include housing.

MO said we could keep the overlay and create base zoning that is more rational. She added that the town and applicants are better off when requirements are clear, so it is still important to continue to discuss rezoning.

PVM said that the densities would have to be reevaluated, the original idea was to allow very dense development by special permit. Base zoning density could be reduced to less with a larger project having to go through the overlay. The rezoning would also broaden uses to include options such as live-work and studio spaces.

JC said that residents may not understand the ultimate goal if the RLF and the Town are going in different directions, and it may seem there are competing interests.

MO said that a problem is that the Town may have trouble visualizing what is there and the town needs to come together on what is desirable in the Village Center. After that, the mechanisms by which that is achieved can be more easily explored.

RD said that our MAPC grant can be used to help us communicate to the town. RLF is a large player, but not the only player in this part of town who will be impacted by changes. Others would benefit from a better understanding of what their options are in this area. We should work together with RLF but ultimately their process will take time and we should not hold up the rezoning conversation to perfectly align with the RLF's plans.

JC said he is not recommending holding anything up but is concerned with going through this independently from RLF. We may not want to make impactful zoning changes to that area while the RLF is proceeding through the overlay for a project. There needs to be a joint approach to incorporate goals into an end project.

Michelle Barnes said that the RLF is very early in their process. She added that they are interested in ensuring there is a transformational project that would hopefully include collaboration with the Town and The Community Builders (TCB). Translating that vision to the Town in cooperation with what SLPAC is trying to do with zoning is important. She asked if there is a risk if they proceed with rezoning that the project, they propose would not coincide with what the new zoning is.

PVM said if we have zoning in place and the RLF comes in with a project that is more expansive, then they could still come in under the Overlay.

MO said that the RLF switching to the Overlay process would relieve some pressure on rezoning. She added that the Housing Choice Act (HCA) will also need to be considered down the road, but that is apart from this rezoning process.

Ms. Barnes said that the RLF is thinking about a minimum density of 15 units per acre, which would comply with the current guidelines of the HCA, and there can be collaboration with the Town if it becomes necessary to increase that density.

PVM said that can be determined when the final guidelines come out which is expected sometime this summer.

GT said that the HCA requires that density by-right.

MO said that if the RLF comes in through the overlay at 15 units per acre, we could rezone the area to what the Town has already approved. This could potentially get us into compliance if the HCA's unit minimum is reduced.

JC said that visioning for changes to the Town parking lot will need to be coordinated with the RLF's project. That area is an asset and should not be reviewed independently.

JC left the meeting at this time.

Ms. Barnes said that the difference between zoning for capacity and production is clear. The RLF could put 5 units per acre, rezone to 25 or 50, and the odds of tearing down the 5 and doing 50 is small. These guidelines matter because we need to contribute to the housing stock, but you can rezone for higher than what the RLF would reasonably develop.

MO agreed that we have an obligation, but it is important to do it in a way that works for the town.

PVM agreed that coordinating the RLF's project with something in the town parking lot is important. In addition, updating zoning in the center on Lewis Street and the Lincoln Road corridor on both sides is also important. There are many difficulties for small businesses outside of the mall acquiring special permits because of the cumbersome process.

Andrew Glass said that increased clarity on what is possible for property owners will make it easier for boards like the Historical Commission to understand what the Town really wants. It facilitates both property owners and the town coming together to good decisions. He sees value in continuing the rezoning process even with the RLF's plans.

GT asked everyone to review the draft zoning and provide comments that can be discussed at the next meeting. He agreed that going forward with rezoning while the RLF is planning to go through the overlay process may send the wrong message. He added that even with the overlay, there needs to be rationalization of the zoning and permitting in the Village Center.

MO said that when we receive clarification of the guidelines on the HCA it will allow for more of a consensus on the draft zoning and the RLF will be further in their process. At that time there can be more discussion about the path forward for the zoning.

Ms. Barnes said that the RLF's intention is to cooperate with the Town and TCB to utilize existing wastewater infrastructure.

GT said we are working with TCB now on moving forward with the hydrology study necessary to determine the steps for updating the septic.

PVM said that zoning was originally intended to drive the kind of transformational project that has been envisioned at the mall and the commuter parking lot. The RLF's project going through the overlay would change what the zoning would need to be because we would not need to use the zoning to encourage higher density in the area.

GT said that we do not know what the RLF will propose for density. A project including the Town parking lot makes more sense in that location. The impetus of changing the underlying zoning was to encourage a project at the mall, so a more limited scope may be appropriate at this point since the RLF is going forward with a project under the overlay.

Business

MO moved to approve the January 31 and February 4, 2022 Minutes. RD seconded. Roll Call: GT aye, MO aye, RD aye.

MO moved to adjourn. RD seconded. Roll Call: GT aye, MO aye, RD aye.

Approved on April 8, 2022.