

## **SLPAC Meeting Minutes April 2, 2021**

### **Zoom Meeting**

PRESENT: Gary Taylor (Chair, GT), James Craig (JC), Rachel Drew (RD)

NOT PRESENT: Margaret Olson

STAFF: Paula Vaughn-MacKenzie (PVM), Jennifer Curtin

GT reported that we received notice that the Town was designated a Housing Choice Community which gives the town advantages in applying for MassWorks grants. The deadline was today, April 2, 2021, to submit an Expression of Interest to the State for funding for design and engineering for The Community Builders (TCB) septic plant. He congratulated the staff for working quickly to get it submitted in time. The Town also has \$30,000 to spend in this fiscal year and \$60,000 next fiscal year with a portion to be matched by TCB for the septic study. TCB will move ahead on their own for a pre-audit of the septic to be done by Weston and Sampson. CDM, which was originally slated to conduct the evaluation, is too busy to take on the pre-audit.

PVM said that the Town needs the Housing Choice Designation to apply for Housing Choice Grants. Housing Choice Grants can be upwards of \$100,000 dollars and sets the Town up to receive extra points on applications under the MassWorks program which funds larger infrastructure projects. The State will give feedback on the Expression of Interest and, based on the feedback, we will follow up with a formal application.

GT said that we can go forward with the evaluation of the TCB wastewater treatment plant with money available from this fiscal year and, if we can get a grant from the State, we can do design and engineering next fiscal year.

JC asked if TCB will share the results of the Weston and Sampson pre-audit with the Town.

PVM said that she did not see a reason why they would not, especially since they are paying half the cost of the complete evaluation.

The Committee then discussed the Village Center Survey

PVM said that, at the Planning Board meeting on March 23, 2021, the Board discussed each question of the survey draft one-by-one. There were changes proposed by the group that were included into a new draft. Now, it is being brought to SLPAC for discussion before it will be distributed.

Connie Ohlsten congratulated the Planning Department on their work to submit the Expression of Interest. She said that she thinks the survey is too long and has redundant questions and answers. She believes that some of the wording is leading and the survey as whole needs more work. The method of administering the survey also warrants further discussion.

JC asked if the preamble should be more detailed and more informative. He thinks that something should be included about potential zoning changes and that something should be included about the Housing Choice Act.

GT said that, in prior drafts, there was more information in the beginning, but some people were concerned that including information on the Housing Choice Act was leading since we do not know the legislation's full implications. There are links to further information in one of the questions. He agreed that the preamble could provide more information if it is neutral.

Michelle Barnes said that one question asks respondent's thoughts about changes to places beyond the Mall, but she believed that SLPAC was only going to be exclusively considering the Mall area. She added that being broad in terms of geography may invite responses that are not helpful.

GT said that the group has put off deciding on the geographic scope but that it may be helpful to put it on the agenda for the next SLPAC meeting.

Ms. Barnes said that people may feel very differently about development in different areas and combining places together may be confusing.

GT said that SLPAC had previously discussed taking out the Ridge Court Condominium ("flying nuns") and the Ridge Road Condominiums shown as Quadrant 4, but it has not been voted on yet. He added that there is plenty to consider outside of that quadrant so he would support taking it off the table.

Andrew Glass said that if there was some explanation in the beginning it would help to improve clarity about the focus of SLPAC on the Mall, Lincoln Woods, and the commercial area along the other side of Lincoln Road. He added that there seems to be a consensus in the neighborhood that the "flying nuns" is an area that SLPAC should not be considering. He added that exploring ideas and getting people's reaction to that area may still be useful.

Steven Smith said that some people may not want change in the Village Center at all and the survey is long and seems like it is acquiescent to change.

PVM said that the survey takes 10 minutes to complete and there are many options for comments and places to indicate in each question if people do not support changes.

Ms. Ohlsten agreed with Mr. Smith and said that the choices offered are less balanced than they could be. She added that there were many issues that could be put into the preamble and it would get very long.

Bob Domnitz asked if were possible to randomize the order of the questions.

GT said that options to the effect of "I do not want any change" can be closer to the beginning.

Mr. Smith said that that would be helpful.

JC asked if the questions could be changed randomly.

Mr. Smith said that as a teacher he has found that it is easy to have tests and surveys randomize the questions with each taker.

PVM said that his point is well taken and will put those types of responses further up and more interspersed.

Jessica Packineau said she participated in the discussion about whether to include Quadrant 4. She was under the impression that the focus had narrowed to the business districts. She added that access to the survey could be people's first indication that their neighborhood is included in these discussions. It gives the whole town the option to state their opinions on what they would like to see in someone else's neighborhood.

RD asked if the discussion is keeping Quadrant 4 in the survey or keeping it in the consideration of SLPAC.

PVM said that there have been many public hearings with people from the neighborhood. The group was discussing taking Quadrant 4 out of the purview of the rezoning. It was never officially voted on, but the Committee members can discuss and decide to take it out of the survey.

GT said that there was discussion on whether to remove Quadrant 4, but the new Housing Choice Act discouraged SLPAC from making a final decision.

JC said that the focus should be on the Mall side and we will not know the impacts of the Housing Choice Act for at least 6-12 months. He agreed that the business district on the other side of Lincoln Road should also be addressed. He believes that current zoning of the B-2 district should be simplified and allow more uses without special permits. He added that he was under the impression that it was agreed upon to focus on the Mall area.

GT said that that was the consensus, but it has not been voted on. He is unsure if it needs to be on an agenda explicitly as an item.

GT said that he believes that the B-2 zone along Lewis Street should be kept in.

Ms. Ohlsten said that until SLPAC agrees to take the "flying nuns" out of the zoning discussion it should be kept in the survey.

JC said that the vote to take it out of the zoning discussion should be noticed as an official agenda item.

GT agreed.

RD said that Quadrant 4 is too heterogeneous to be all considered one unit. There are commercial operations along that quadrant, but it also includes many residential parcels.

GT said that the businesses along Lincoln Road are already in the B-1 business district. Those would be included in the new proposed zoning even if the residential portion of Quadrant 4 is removed.

RD said that people who do not have that context may see that quadrant and may not understand the differentiation between the zones that are already B-1 and the residential parcels. They may see it as combining that district and the residential area.

GT said the map already shows the businesses along Lincoln Road as part of the Mall quadrant.

RD said that that is not clear on the map in the beginning of the survey.

Jennifer Curtin shared the map on her screen.

PVM said that the map can be changed to reflect the conversation at this meeting.

GT agreed that the map needs to be redrawn.

JC said that the votes to remove Quadrant 4 from both the survey and from the scope of the rezoning discussions should both be agenda items at the next SLPAC meeting.

PVM said that she will include the items on the April 20<sup>th</sup> SLPAC agenda.

GT said that this gives time to develop a more informative introduction to the survey.

Mr. Smith asked if the business district on the other side where the church is might be rezoned and if that is written out somewhere.

GT said that there was set of proposed changes to the zoning laws developed by SLPIC that were distributed. Those will be re-drafted considering the Housing Choice Act and other factors. The strip along Lincoln Road on the other side from the Mall is already in the B-1 district and is included in the quadrant with the Mall in thinking about zoning changes.

Mr. Smith said that they plan to make changes to make things easier to do. He lives next to the church and he wanted to know what changes are being talked about.

GT said that proposed changes for zoning are the Village Business District. The draft language is in the documents sent out for this meeting.

PVM said that there will be a new preamble written for the Survey, we will look at the order of questions to rearrange for balance, and on Tuesday, April 20<sup>th</sup>, there will be votes on the residential portion of Quadrant 4 being taken out of the rezoning discussions and the survey.

The Committee then began the B-2 district discussion.

PVM said that Quadrant 3 on the survey map includes all of the current B-2 zoning district which is comprised of the businesses along Lewis Street including Lincoln Tree and Tracy's Gas Station as well as multifamily houses.

GT said that the ZBA grants special permits for most uses except for restaurants, where the special permit granting authority is the Planning Board. Where the ZBA is the special permit granting authority, the Planning Board still needs to submit a recommendation to the ZBA and needs to do Site Plan Review. He believes that it is a needlessly complicated process. Mixed-use is only allowed if the ZBA deems the uses compatible, which adds another layer of difficulty. This was seen with 2 Lewis Street where the Planning Board had to write a recommendation to the ZBA for a live/work operation for an art gallery. The project then needed a special permit from the ZBA. Quadrant 3 was originally included in the village residential portion of the rezoning. There needs to be a discussion about whether the group wants to include the B-2 District in the new zoning or to leave it out and instead revise the existing zoning to create a more rational permitting process.

PVM said that the Committee needs to think about the existing residential uses in the B-2 district. We do not want to make the residential units that are there non-conforming. SLPAC also needs to think about whether the vision is for Lewis Street to gradually become more of a mixed-use residential area or if they want it to remain a catch-all for similar uses to the landscape and tree services that are already there.

Mr. Glass said that it would be interesting to understand some of the results of the survey as they could allow for an informed discussion on that point. It is a complex issue to address, and

information needs to be gathered with more outreach in the neighborhood and the greater Town. He thought it important to see how the Town wants to see Lewis Street and other parts of the Station area developed and how these things fit together holistically. He believes that it is too early to answer these big questions without information from other stakeholders.

JC asked if SLPAC should first look at how to make things less onerous to allow mixed-uses by right and then evaluate responses from the area and look at the larger zoning changes later. He added that he is concerned about shrinking the current commercial district since it is already small.

PVM agreed that it would be easier to work in steps. SLPAC can look at the B-2 District as it is and streamline that process first before moving forward with the larger scale rezoning. She added that this conservative approach would allow a holistic review.

Mr. Smith said that there was a man who wanted to open a wine and cheese business in the business district and had to jump through many hoops to get it off the ground and eventually he walked away from it. He can see why streamlining the process in the business district is a good idea.

PVM said that that is exactly what they are talking about. People can go through the process for years and then the Special Permit can be withdrawn in 6 months to a year. This process has discouraged small businesses from opening in that district. With revisions, there would still be review but the process would be rational.

GT said that SLPAC needs to think about redrafting zoning for the B-2 district and consider either taking all the rezoning at the same time or doing it in separate steps.

GT moved to consider redrafting the B-2 Zoning as it currently exists. JC seconded. Roll Call: GT aye, JC aye, RD aye.

## **Business**

JC moved to approve the Feb 5, 2021 minutes. GT seconded. Roll Call: GT aye, JC aye, RD aye.

JC moved to approve the March 16, 2021 minutes as amended. RD seconded. Roll Call: GT aye, RD aye, JC aye.

GT moved to adjourn. RD second. Roll Call: GT aye, JC aye, RD aye.

Approved April 20, 2021.