

**HARVARD PLANNING BOARD
MEETING MINUTES
SEPTEMBER 22, 2014
APPROVED: NOVEMBER 3, 2014**

Chairwoman Kara McGuire Minar opened the meeting at 7:15pm in Volunteer's Hall at the Harvard Public Library under Chapter 40A and the Code of the Town of Harvard Chapter 125

Members Present: Kara McGuire Minar, Erin McBee, Joe Hutchinson and Don Graham

Others Present: Liz Allard (LUB Admin.), Bill Scanlan (Town Planner), Maren Caulfield (Harvard Press), Jim Stevenson, Stu Sklar, Michael Silva, Dave Harpur, Theresa Hoggins, Jim Breslauer, Deb Thomson, Ken Atwell, Brenda Cunningham, Fran Nickerson, Gerry Hall, William Stevenson, Lee Zupanic, Vicki Maxant, Stan Murphy, John Seeley, Lucy Wallace, Jim Stoddard, Phil Cunningham, Jen Manell, Carl Lochiatto, Bill Carroll, Kate Pullano, Michelle Catalina, Sue Toll, Andrea Hill, Eric Buchovecky, Tammy & Peter Alfano, Ken Swanton, Angela Gaffney, Pablo Carbonell, Rosemary Theriault, Paula Johnston, Karen & Steve Hierman, Brad Taylor, George Watkins, Jim Higgins, Meg & Virgil Bagdonas, Robert & Theresa Curran and Jim & Kate Lee

Public Forum to Gather Input on a Zoning Bylaw Amendment to Chapter 125-13J and 125-52G re: allowed size of a grocery store

McGuire Minar gave an overview of the evenings events. She further explained in February of this year the Economic Development Committee (EDC) proposed a bylaw amendment which would have increased the Ayer Road Village Special Permit (ARV-SP) provision of a building not exceeding 30,000 square feet to 45,000 square feet; with six bylaws before the Planning Board (PB) there was not the appropriate amount of time to include the EDC's request on the warrant for Annual Town Meeting (ATM) on April 1st. McGuire Minar noted that the current protective (zoning) bylaw allows for a grocery store up 15,000 square feet by right.

Scanlan presented the Planning Board PowerPoint presentation.

Rich Maiore and Sandy Chapman from EDC were present to discuss the proposal. Maiore explained the EDC was created to assist the Planning Board and the Board of Selectmen on developing the commercial district. The EDC is awaiting the new Master Plan for further direction on how to improve the commercial district. The EDC is not advocating for any individual business, they are just laying out the options available to the Town. Maiore presented the EDC's PowerPoint presentation.

McGuire Minar stated the focus currently is on a grocery store, but could it be for any store as allowed by the protective bylaw. As of now the EDC has only requested the increase to grocery stores. The proposed amendments could be limited to just grocery stores. McGuire Minar stated the PB is looking to define what a grocery store is. McGuire Minar stated the tax revenue generated from a large scale grocery store is equal to four large houses in Town. By limiting the use to just a grocery store the Town could be left with a large empty building that can only be used for grocery store. Maiore stated he has been approaching the subject from the survey results and as a way to generate tax revenue. McGuire Minar explained if the structure was limited to a grocery store you would need to go back to ATM to approve another use. Sandy Chapman asked how many grocery stores have come forward since the 2004 change to the protective bylaw. McGuire Minar stated none.

Dave Harpur stated there are two reasons to support such an amendment, one is tax revenue, which has been dispelled, and the other is desirability. Seventy-five percent of north Harvard residents are opposed to a grocery store at the size that is currently allowed by the protective bylaw.

Phil Cunningham asked if the PB has issued any ARV-SP since its adoption. Allard stated Bowers Brook apartments and the medical building had been constructed under an ARV-SP. Cunningham wondered if the purpose is not to generate taxes, then why show a slide on the potential tax revenue. Are we moving the goal post here, is there a lot more to come that is not yet said. Maiore stated the surveys also indicated the desire for a pharmacy, however most pharmacies want an anchor store to locate with. Cunningham noted he spent time walking around the exterior of several grocery stores locally to see first hand the activity that goes along with these businesses, which should be regulated at some level. Cunningham also noted that traffic on Ayer Road is already an issue and any new development may only make it worse. Things need to be reviewed on a long term basis rather than a right now need or want.

Steve Hierman noted the map during Scanlan's presentation did not show the very large (60,000 square foot) Market Basket in Littleton, in which a grocery store in Harvard would have to compete with. How would the Town deal with traffic, not only on Ayer Road, but on the tributary roads as well? A business of this type will want to draw from other communities, for what purpose, so we will not have to drive five miles to another store?

Michael Silva stated the Town already has a rural store, the General.

Deb Thomson stated she has concerns with traffic; she would assume there would be more heavy truck traffic and would there be a more detailed traffic study with a development of this type, not only along Ayer Road, but the side roads as well. Maiore stated it would be something to look at depending on the type of development.

Michelle Catalina read a written statement in which she strongly urged the PB not to go forward with any changes to development on Ayer Road. Maiore noted the EDC would not propose the removal of the Special Permit process.

J Ferguson stated he lived in Groton for seven years and see no benefit to commercial development. He would recommend just saying no to the proposed amendment and consider reducing the allowable size to 5,000 square feet.

Jim Breslauer stated the traffic and allowing a developer to proceed with no special permit process under the 15,000 square foot scenario is a concern with him. Breslauer noted there are great wetland resource areas bounding the commercial district; it would be difficult to put in development without impacts to the resource areas.

Pablo Carbonell stated the increase in the allowable size would change the look and feel of Harvard on Route 110.

Eric Buchovecky stated when looking for a place to live Harvard had the rural character he desired, once you create that type of business, more will want to grow and come to Harvard.

Angela Gaffney had questions about the options. Gaffney stated there is a false sense that services are not good, however if they are done well they can be good.

Fran Nickerson asked if one of the provisions of the bylaw could be increased, but not another. Maiore stated you could, but it may not make us as attractive to developers.

Dave Harpur stated he does not believe as a whole the Town is against commercial development, it would depend what type and the impacts of those services. Harpur has concerns the residents are not being heard.

Robert Curran asked if the proposed amendment is because there is someone at the ready or are we just hoping to be attractive to a development. Maiore stated there are no current proposals.

Stu Sklar stated he sees no point in changing the zoning; he suggested the implementation of much tougher design standards. The 2007 traffic study said the Town needed lights on Ayer road. The Town owns Ayer Road, not the State. McGuire Minar stated the PB is currently working on design guidelines.

It was noted there is a large number of vacant office space in the surrounding area.

McGuire Minar thanked those in attendance as well as those who submitted comments to the Board and on Nextdoor Harvard.

Adjournment

McBee made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:42pm. Graham seconded the motion. The vote was unanimously in favor of the motion.

Signed: _____
Liz Allard, Clerk

EXHIBITS & OTHER DOCUMENTS

- Letter to the Planning Board from Michelle Catalina, dated 20140922