

Planning Board –Regular Meeting

Longmeadow Public Schools’ Central Office, Room A15 – 535 Bliss Road, Longmeadow MA 01106

Wednesday May 3rd, 2023 7:00 p.m.

Members Present: Cheryl Thibodeau, Chair; Walter Gunn, Clerk; Bruce Colton, Don Holland, Chris Legiadre.

Members Absent: None

Others Present: Director of Planning Corrin Meise-Munns, Diana Pun, Dije Olanrewaju.

The *Planning Board In-person Regular Meeting* was called to order at 7:04pm by Chair Cheryl Thibodeau.

Meeting Minutes Review:

1. **Regular Meeting April 4th, 2023:** Bruce Colton made a motion, and was seconded by Walter Gunn, to accept the minutes as presented. All in favor 4-0 with one abstention (Chris Legiadre), motion passed.

Vote - Recommendation on Zone Change Petition for Parcel 1, Lot 38, at 899-925 Shaker Road from “Residence A-1” Zone to “Business” Zone for Town Meeting:

Bruce Colton indicated that as of date archive research has not produced any credible evidence to sustain the claim of a 1968 (or thereabouts) agreement between town officials and developers that would withhold the development of Lot 38 in perpetuity. Furthermore, in 1963 the state passed legislation that reduced the hold of land development to twenty years, therefore, even if an agreement had been in place but was not properly recorded, it would now be considered expired under state law.

The issues at stake are varied and valid on various levels, some of the items that were discussed were:

1. Incorporating this lot into the larger business district would allow for a more efficient site plan with ample parking and improved vehicular flow but it would eliminate a needed buffer between the business operations and nearby residents, as the current vacant lot provides landscape screening and substantial distance between the northerly abutters and the businesses. That said, the current state of the lot could be improved for aesthetic, privacy and acoustic purposes.
2. Construction activity on the site has been minimal. The redevelopment of the site only on existing footprint is acceptable under current regulations and as such a zone change request (and its end result) has no effect on the project’s evolution. This unexplained status quo has led to concerns about the fate of the site and how adding newly zoned land to the existing business district footprint would open the door to a complete reconfiguration of the site’s design either by current landowners or future landowners. While the businesses that provided services to the neighborhood at this address have been cherished by residents over the years and the community at large is eager to have them return to the area, the board is mindful of the impact these businesses’ operations have had in the lives of direct residential abutters.
3. The possibility of negotiations between the northerly direct abutter and the Pun family to divide Lot 38 and rezone only a portion of it is an option that has not been explored; this would provide each stakeholder with land to remove any non-conformities on their respective properties, expand their respective uses within the current setback regulations and help maintain the needed screening.
4. While a maximum of 20% of a residential lot’s front yard would be allowed to be paved, extension of paved surfaces in the future to increase parking capacity would likely be outside of the Planning Board’s purview and as such, there wouldn’t be any review by the board of such design change and its impact on direct abutters, although it could potentially trigger DPW’s MS4 permit review.

Ms. Pun indicated that Pun Longmeadow Realty remains committed to rebuilding the site and continues to work on construction documents and a construction timeline with the general contractor as well as the development of new lease agreements with prospective tenants. Additionally, she stated that the trees currently planted on Lot 38 are expected to remain.

Chair Cheryl Thibodeau made a motion, and was seconded by Walter Gunn, to recommend the zone change petition for Parcel 1, Lot 38, on Shaker Road from “Residence A-1” Zone to “Business” Zone at the upcoming Annual Town Meeting. Roll call vote – Ms. Thibodeau: yes; Mr. Gunn: no, Mr. Colton: yes; Mr. Holland: no; Mr. Legiadre: no. Vote is 2 in favor and 3 opposed, motion failed and the board will not recommend this zone change at the. The board will develop a statement to explain this vote on the floor of the upcoming Town Meeting.

Discussion: Community Preservation Committee Delegate Appointment:

Chair Cheryl Thibodeau made a motion, and was seconded by Don Holland, to modify the agenda’s order and discuss the role of a Community Preservation Committee delegate as the next topic. Roll call vote – Ms. Thibodeau: yes; Mr. Gunn: yes, Mr. Colton: yes; Mr. Holland: yes; Mr. Legiadre: yes. All in favor 5-0, motion passed.

Mr. Holland will not seek re-election next June, therefore a new Planning Board member is expected to be appointed to the Community Preservation Committee at the start of the next fiscal year. He indicated that this committee, also known as CPC, is a town board made up of nine members that are a combination of at-large members and others appointed by the Planning Board, Historical Commission, Conservation Commission and Parks & Recreation Commission. The committee is responsible for making recommendations for how CPA funds (which are collected via a property tax surcharge) should be spent in the four CPA program areas: Community Housing, Historic Preservation, Open Space and Recreation. Each season there are between six and twelve applications to review during the committee’s “busy period” from August through the following February, all of which are carefully discussed by board members prior to making any recommendations for Town Meeting, where these requests are ultimately approved or denied. He has enjoyed his tenure with the CPC and praises the camaraderie displayed by its current members, therefore he foresees that any Planning Board member that volunteers to take his place at the CPC will have an equally rewarding experience.

Discussion - Draft Revisions to Planning Board Rules and Regulations:

Members of the board and department staff have been exploring ideas on how to improve application handling procedures to optimize the review process and allow ample time for all stakeholders to analyze documents in a timely manner. A key item is the definition of a proper timeline that abides by state and local regulations regarding maximum allowed response times while still providing the board with the opportunity to declare an application formally “complete” and “received”. In the past, previous legal rulings have clearly defined some of these situations, therefore such language should be reviewed prior to finalizing any revisions to the board’s regulations to ensure consistency across all documents.

Chair Cheryl Thibodeau recommended that board members review the proposed changes as well as the Zoning Bylaw section related to Site & Design Review and provide their feedback at a subsequent meeting.

Discussion – EEA’s Land Use Planning Grant Program:

Director of Planning Corrin Meise-Munns described this grant as a program that provides funding of up to \$50,000 for communities to work with consultants on any projects related to zoning for sustainable housing production, mitigation of climate change through zoning and other regulations that reduce energy use and greenhouse gas emissions via a better mix of land uses, more compact growth, enhanced design or others as well as zoning that results in permanent land conservation. However, given that the town is actively engaged in a Long Range Plan overhaul, it was the consensus among attendees that it’s best to review the results of the Long Range Plan’s final version to better determine which project should be considered for a grant program of this nature.

Other Business:

1. The next LRP steering committee group meeting is scheduled for May 22 and the first LPR public forum is scheduled for May 24. Additionally, the “Community Conversations” event, in partnership with Bay Path is scheduled for June 9 at the Longmeadow Adult Center.
2. Work on the Hazard Mitigation Plan review has begun and is expected to take approximately 18 months.
3. The General and Zoning Bylaws have been officially reformatted and the new eCode online platform was launched just prior to the meeting.

Walter Gunn made a motion, and was seconded by Bruce Colton, to adjourn the meeting. All in favor 5-0, motion passed, meeting adjourned at 9:24pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Bianca Damiano