

PLANNING BOARD/SELECTBOARD JOINT MEETING

DATE: October 29, 2020

TIME: 6:00 P.M.

FOR: Joint Meeting Planning Board/Selectboard

PLACE: Zoom Virtual Webinar

PRESENT: Selectboard: Steve Bannon, Chair; Ed Abrahams; Bill Cooke; Leigh Davis
Planning Board: Brandee Nelson, Chair; Malcolm Fick; Jonathan Hankin;
Jeremy Higa; Pedro Pachano; Garfield Reed
Mark Pruhenski, Town Manager
Chris Rembold, Assistant Town Manager/Director of Planning & Community
Development

Present in the audience: Eileen Mooney

Ms. Nelson read the Governor's order and MGL. 7c. 30A sec. 20(f) as printed on the agenda.

Ms. Nelson called the meeting to order at 6:01 P.M. She did a roll call vote of the members who were present.

Roll call Mr. Bannon, present; Mr. Abrahams, present; Ms. Davis, present; Mr. Cooke, present
Mr. Higa, present; Mr. Hankin, present; Mr. Fick, present; Mr. Pachano, present;
Mr. Reed, present; Ms. Nelson, present

HOUSING NEEDS STUDY:

The boards discussed the Housing Needs Study prepared by BRPC. Philip Arnold, a Community Planner from BRPC was present to give a summary of the study.

Mr. Arnold said the study is still in draft form as there is information to add. He said the Massachusetts Housing Partnership set loose guidelines for a clear picture not just what the numbers tell us.

Mr. Arnold said that overall housing is limited for renters. He said there is limited availability and what is available is expensive. He said half of the seniors are cost burdened. Income levels have not increased in line with the cost of living. Additionally, COVID has over inflated the market.

Mr. Arnold said there is a lot of data and it is a lot to digest. He said this is a basic overview. He said some problems have been identified so we need to make headway in correcting the data.

Mr. Rembold asked if anyone had any questions.

Mr. Abrahams said the study shows a median home asking price of \$798,000. He asked if that is correct.

Mr. Hankin said that information is skewed and not correct. He said it includes 18 condos on Bridge Street offered at \$925,000 that have not been developed and might not be built.

Mr. Rembold said the information was accurate in March. It shows a picture of the market.

Mr. Cooke said section 10 suggests creating a municipal housing plan.

Mr. Arnold said typically these types of recommendations are not made. He said the Selectboard has the authority to approve.

Mr. Rembold encouraged everyone to look at the Master Plan as goals listed in the Master Plan may need to be shifted based on the data.

Mr. Hankin said many of the Master Plan goals have been met. He suggested we need to make notes in the report whether goals have been achieved or not.

Mrs. Mooney said she had a lot of comments after review of the document.

Ms. Nelson suggested Mrs. Mooney send her comments to Mr. Rembold for future discussion.

Mr. Hankin said there is reference to market rent. He asked what is market rent and how would that be determined as it is all private transactions? He said he has no idea what the last strategy is that is listed on page 55.

Mr. Arnold said he used a calculation from the Census Bureau for the comprehensive rent.

Mr. Rembold said HUD and the Census Bureau will publish rents in Berkshire County, less Pittsfield. He said this is a typical standard.

Mr. Pachano said if anyone is interested Nantucket has a good production plan that can be shared. Mr. Pachano asked about the short term rental data. He asked if Air B&Bs are short term rentals.

Mr. Arnold said yes. He said it is hard to get data on short term rentals so the data is not necessarily accurate. He said it is very hard to get accurate data.

Mr. Pachano said the study shows 950 total rentals in Great Barrington. He said only 18% (178) of the rentals are homes for residents. He said the study does give us an idea about what is in Town.

Ms. Nelson said this was information requested for the Housing Needs Study because the information has been difficult to get.

Mr. Fick said he hoped BRPC would get information the rest of us don't have access to. He said the study shows 410 vacancies on page 17. It says the vacancies are seasonal or recreational.

Mr. Rembold said that is census data. He said seasonal housing was discussed.

Mr. Fick asked how it is known if seasonal housing is vacant.

Mr. Hankin said the tax bill will go elsewhere.

Mr. Arnold said he will look into how the census tracks it. He said some data can be skewed because of broad definitions to account for municipalities across the country.

Mr. Rembold said theoretically people should be counted even with a second home. He said there were about 300 homes tracked through tax bill for personal property—non-domicile.

Mr. Hankin said the study shows 46-48 mobile homes in Great Barrington.

Mr. Arnold said that is inaccurate. It is a number based off of a 2018 American Survey. He said that is an estimate based on the census. It had not been discussed with Mr. Rembold.

Ms. Davis said section 5 addressed senior housing. She said the seniors are the forgotten middle. Not all seniors qualify as low income. She said she would like to see the numbers. The forgotten middle struggle with expenses even though they don't qualify as low income.

Mr. Arnold said the study can go further into that area.

Ms. Davis said people feel fear about being supported. She said she is concerned about the lack of affordable rentals. She said maybe we can get case studies from other towns. She suggested perhaps board and committee members could work on that getting that information.

Ms. Nelson said Mr. Hankin and Mr. Pachano have done quite a bit of research. She said we can get back to that.

Ms. Davis said she would like to dive into the short term rental regulation as well.

Mr. Reed said he doesn't have the report but home prices are astronomical and there is a huge discrepancy in salaries.

Mr. Higa said he read through part of the study and skimmed some of it. He said there are strategies from other communities. He wondered about the Town's ability to get the public to a place to accept the recommendations.

Ms. Nelson said we have talked as a Board how to educate the public. She said it needs to be a town wide effort.

Mr. Rembold said he can look into some information. He said Salem, MA did an excellent study on the housing need in that town.

Ms. Nelson said the study doesn't report any houses built since 2010.

Mr. Rembold said there was information from the 2018 American Survey. He said an asterisk can maybe mark that information. He said maybe Mr. Arnold didn't want to point out something wrong. He said there are many discrepancies that could have asterisks. He said he is afraid to discredit the entire document.

Ms. Nelson said the ADU bylaw has been in place for several years. She asked if there is a way to show how many ADUs have been built. She said she expects that to be a small number but it could be part of the data. She said it could help to inform the public.

Ms. Davis said there are homeless amongst the population. She wondered if it would be appropriate to track those numbers. She said it would be interesting to know where these people are going. If it is related to housing or the lack thereof.

Mr. Arnold said they are tracked through the ACS.

Ms. Nelson thanked Mr. Arnold and Mr. Rembold. She said she is looking forward to seeing a document.

Mr. Rembold said anyone with comments should send them to him.

Mr. Pachano said there isn't an agenda item for the housing sub-committee but he asked if an update can be given.

Ms. Nelson said an update is fine. There can't be any decisions made.

Mr. Pachano said he had distributed a document. He suggested that tax abatements be allowed for affordable housing projects. He shared an example from Province Town MA explaining how that town calculates the abatement.

Mr. Higa said an abatement is calculated not a tax bill.

Mr. Pachano said the project is vetted or the property is required to have year round leases. He said the average median income would increase to 100% instead of 80% for assistance. Additionally, parcelization of non-conforming lots would be allowed for development of ADUs. The district's density would remain the same. He said this model was taken from Nantucket.

Ms. Nelson said she thinks this would be a tough sell.

Mr. Pachano said the next meeting will be on November 16 if anyone would like to attend.

TOWN WIDE PARKING:

The Boards had a general discussion of Town wide parking. Not all members agree that parking should be a priority.

The ideas discussed include a decal program for full-time residents for a nominal fee, parking meters for Main Street and areas of Route 7. It was discussed that there are 800 private parking spaces in Town that are paid for. The Town could possibly offer tax incentives for businesses that have parking that could be made available for Town wide parking, such as the Days Inn.

It was noted that Pittsfield has a parking management plan that seems to work.

Ms. Nelson said the Selectboard and Town Staff are working on parking issues.

Mr. Rembold said the staff and the Selectboard are working on parking. It is a high priority goal for the Selectboard. He said Way Finding is a useful tool to help people not familiar with the Town get around. He said it is a system of cohesive designs to guide people. He said the Town interns are in the beginning stages of writing a parking or Way Finding grant that will hopefully be available in the spring. He said a united strategy would help the process.

Mrs. Mooney said at the Coffee Hour with the Town Manager there was discussion of a plan for 60 long term parking spaces somewhere off of Castle Hill Avenue.

Mr. Rembold said staff is working on identifying space on the west side of Main Street.

Mr. Bannon said there has not been any recent discussion about parking as a revenue stream. In the past it has not been supported.

LIGHTING ORDINANCE:

Ms. Nelson said the discussion of a lighting ordinance started as part of the 2021 zoning amendments. As we discussed it we determined that it would be better served as a Town bylaw (Town Code) instead of a zoning bylaw.

Ms. Nelson shared a Power Point presentation.

Mr. Hankin said if lighting is addressed through the zoning there is no way to address pre-existing conditions. He said to bring people into conformance it would be better in the Town Code where there is no protection for preexisting conditions.

Ms. Davis said this is brilliant. She said this is music to her ears. She thanked Ms. Nelson for the comprehensive Power Point.

Mr. Fick said the problem is that there is no enforcement for the recommendations put on permits.

Ms. Nelson said the Planning Board is supportive of the idea we would like to hear from the Selectboard.

Mr. Bannon said he would put it on an agenda.

Mr. Pachano suggested discussion of an enforcement mechanism.

Mr. Cooke asked if there would need to be a lighting enforcement officer.

Ms. Nelson said light meters are not expensive. She said she would look into it and put something together for the Selectboard.

2021 ZONING MODIFICATIONS:

The Planning Board expressed that there are not enough housing opportunities and there is not enough community outreach. They said the community outreach can't start early enough. They encouraged the Selectboard to assist with the outreach. Even if the Selectboard does not agree with all of the modifications, the Planning Board wanted to make them aware that more collaboration would be appreciated. The Planning Board said they are in early discussions of the B-3 zoning that runs from Church Street to River Street, School Street and Bridge Street.

Mr. Rembold said the B-3 zone was written in 2008 to allow reuse at the New England Log Home Site and Searles School. The bylaw has not been used because it is confusing and it doesn't work so the Planning Board is trying to fix the zoning to allow uses for other properties in the zone.

Ms. Nelson said Mr. Hankin and Mr. Pachano are working on an affordable housing overlay for the length of Route 7.

Mr. Pachano explained that the corridor zoning, a term he has applied to it, is intended to provide for the community needs of affordable housing, child care and senior housing. He said the area would include the Route 7 corridor, skipping Main Street. He said the overlay would take advantage of the existing infrastructure. He said we are trying to figure out where it will be applied.

Ms. Nelson asked the Selectboard to look at the language and provide some feedback about increasing the density.

Mr. Abrahams asked if this proposal had been discussed with the Sustainability Committee.

Mr. Pachano said he is hoping they will attend the next meeting on November 16.

Mr. Bannon said he is not a big proponent of density but Stockbridge Road might be a good area.

Mr. Pachano said infill is the key to preserving open space.

Mr. Bannon said the Selectboard would welcome a representative from the Planning Board to attend Selectboard meetings to give updates on what the Planning Board is working on.

Ms. Davis asked what area would be included.

Ms. Nelson said the corridor would run from Guido's to Maple Avenue then from Belcher Square north.

The Boards will have further discussion of these proposals.

CITIZEN'S SPEAK TIME

No citizen's spoke.

Having concluded their business, Ms. Nelson adjourned without objection at 7:45 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Kimberly L. Shaw

Kimberly L. Shaw
Planning Board Secretary