

Fair Housing Committee
Meeting Minutes
December 12, 2023

Meeting convened at 3:34. Present were Thatcher Kezer, Chair; Joe Whipple, Becky Curran-Cutting, Dirk Isbrandtsen, Mimi Hollister, and Debby Larkin on Zoom.

Thatcher advised that Erin Noonan has taken a leave from all official activities to care for her daughter who has been diagnosed with bone cancer and is receiving aggressive treatment at Mass General Hospital.

Thatcher said that he was going through all the minutes, currently in draft form, for this committee over many months to clean them up and create a consistent formatting. He will have them ready for approval at the next meeting.

Main agenda item: Update on MBTA Community 3A Zoning

Becky updated us on all the public education and especially focus group work that has been done on this state initiative. This included focus groups with developers and landowners; architects; town department heads; citizens. The input is all leading to five areas in town to be possibly designated as zoned for multi-unit development “by right” as opposed to “by special permit”. Hence there will be further analysis of these areas going forward. The areas are:

- 1) The Coffin School and Tioga Way – several under-utilized buildings currently there. The owner is amenable to further exploration.
- 2) Village St. from the Clam Box Restaurant down to Spring St. and all the way to Shubie’s on Atlantic Ave.
- 3) Broughton Rd. Housing Authority re-development, which was very popular and is currently being considered by the Housing Authority.
- 4) The Jewish Community Center, offered by JCC for consideration.
- 5) The Vinnin Square 40R project, also popular because possible increased traffic load is already dealt with in that area.

Becky noted the tight time-line with the analysis to be done by mid-January, but a second grant has been awarded from the state and CHAPA, so that is very helpful to expedite. She also reported on the relevance of the Smart Growth study that was done in 2009 which resulted in a zoning change already completed for number 2 above.

Other analysis that has been completed and/or begun:

- identifying the stake holders to be contacted;
- looking at model relevant by-laws such as for 40R developments;

- determining how many school-age and younger children live in currently existing 40 B's or multi-family places (very few);
- determined that developers are not interested in this economy on developing multi-units with a 35' height limit. Early pictures have been found of higher buildings in the history of the town.
- Becky noted that many people have attended the virtual open-houses and in-person focus groups.

In summary, the preferred plan is what will be on the town warrant and must be completed by mid-January. It could be additional Smart Growth zoning or something else. Much more public education and information will follow before Town Meeting in May. Updates on all of this are on the town website on-going.

Comments:

Joe noted that because of the 2009 Smart Growth zoning change and its effect on the old YMCA and Pleasant St. area, one could theoretically build a multi-unit over the existing National Grand Bank parking lot.

Becky noted that pictures are very important – “This is what a building looks like...” Otherwise people have negative imaginings of huge, ugly buildings crowding our town.

Also, Smart Growth zoning includes the requirement of 25% affordable housing, which is in the interest of this committee. However, developers think 25% is a lot in a small development.

Dirk noted that Harborlight can be an excellent trainer in how to win over the public – they have years of success in reluctant communities. He also spoke about Community Investment Tax Credits to raise some money for the Affordable Housing Trust Fund – something to pursue in the future. Dirk is now on the Executive Committee of Harborlight and Kurt James is on the Board of Directors, so we have very good connections to that resource.

No public comments.

Meeting adjourned at 4:11 pm.

Mimi Hollister, Scribe