

Town of Farmington
Planning Board Workshop Meeting
Tuesday, February 4, 2020

Board Members Present:

Charlie King, Chairman
Rick Pelkey, Vice Chairman
Neil Johnson, Alternate Selectmen's Rep.
Bruce Bridges
Bill Fisher

Others Present:

Kyle Pimental, Interim Planner
Stuart Arnett, Arnett Development Group

Board Members Absent:

TJ Place, Selectmen's Rep., excused
Stephen Henry, excused

BUSINESS BEFORE THE BOARD:

Call to Order:

Chairman King called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance:

All present stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

Get Well Soon Bill - Mr. Fisher said he would be taking the next 4 months off to deal with some medical issues but that he planned to keep watching from the sidelines and giving his opinions. Chairman King said that on behalf of the board he would like to thank Mr. Fisher for his participation and commitment to not only the Planning Board but to the other boards in town. He said the town appreciates his service and looks forward to his speedy recovery.

Zoning Amendments: Mr. Pimental said at the last meeting the board asked him to work on 3 things: parking amendments to the site plan regulations, developing a permit for recreational vehicles and making some revisions to the Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) application. He said he asked the GIS (Geographic Information System mapping system) Planner to create a map depicting the sq. footage of each parcel in the Village Center (VC) and how many units are allowed under the current zoning (1 unit per 5,000 sq. ft. of land) assuming the lots were vacant. He said that a lot of the smaller lots, especially on Mechanic Street and south of Civic Street show zero units because the lot is smaller than 5,000 sq. ft. The parcels could hold 195 units if they were completely built out but it is not necessarily a realistic number because there are existing buildings on the lots he said.

Mr. King asked if there was any analysis done of the current unit density. He said some of the parcels have multi-units on them now and the density is more than what would be permitted and some of them have less.

Mr. Pimental said they didn't get into that because they don't have good information on the mixed use buildings as that is outside of their assessing data.

He said the second map he provided shows how the number of units could jump from 195 units to 566 units. He pointed out that the building where the Cumberland Farms store is located shows it could hold 21 units and that is not realistic for that building. If the Cumberland Farms wasn't there and residential units were allowed on the first floor the maximum number of units would be 566 he said.

Mr. King asked if the map takes into account that residential units are not allowed on the 1st floor.

Mr. Pimental said it does not take that into account and this is if all of the buildings were completely built out with just residential units based on the building size.

He said they divided the maximum number in half to assume that half of the units were of mixed use and the other half were residential units which comes down to 288 units which is 88 more units than what is currently allowed.

He said this was an exercise to determine what percentage the town may see with the change in density and he assumed it would be a 30%-40% difference with a maximum build out. This was done to give the board an idea of the change from density based on land size to basing it on building size and if everything was residential he said.

Mr. King said with the way this was calculated he did not think it was useable data at this point. He said if they start saying this people will believe this is what could potentially happen. A lot of the buildings are one story and that none of the area that is currently built out would be developed into residential units he said.

He said some of the existing lots on Main Street such as next to the Friends of Farmington building (the former Mason's building) where there is a big housing project where there are 10-15 units and next to that is the Pizza Shack and there are 3 units above that so there are a lot more units there now than show on this map. He said he didn't know if the density build-out would be as much as 30%-40% because the current number of units is higher and in some of the first floor counts the build-out might be more like a 10%-20% increase.

Mr. King said he was not saying that someone couldn't buy a vacant lot and build it to the max or buy a property and take down the existing building and then build it to the max. There are sites with one story structures where someone could build 2 or 3 stories on top of it to get that density he said.

He said he would like to see the number of units with the density now and the maximum number based on the proposed zoning with the current buildings as he didn't think it possible to forecast what could be built.

Mr. Pimental said when he was putting this together he wanted the board to see there had been a lot of talk about what the density is going to do, what the max is and that realistically they probably would not see any more than a 20%-30% increase and he thought that was on

the high end. He said he would refine the information given to the board because he thought it would be valuable when they start talking about parking requirements and the potential number of units that could be there and about what they are going to need for parking. He said he looked at other communities and how they are addressing parking within dense areas. Some of them are more flexible and in some cases it is the discretion of the Planning Dept. to look at the use and take into consideration if the use would have no turnover for hours or if there would be constant turnover when determining the final number of spaces he said. He said they are also requiring accommodations for other types of transportation such as bike racks and EV (electric vehicle charging) stations as part of the development regulations. Mr. Pimental said he would take the feedback from the board and it will be a matter of how much local data they can get into their GIS system to try to make it accurate as possible as they are not able to field check everything. Mr. King said the closer it is to the accurate number the better they will be able to inform the voters about what is being proposed and the max calculated impact for the change in density.

EDC Goals – Mr. Pimental said he met with the Economic Development Committee Chair, the Town Administrator and the Strafford County Regional Planning Commission Economic Planner to discuss what the EDC's goals are. He said a CDBG (Community Development Block Grant) may become available in July and if the Town applies for the grant that he and the Economic Planner would be available to help write the application and move it forward.

He said they talked about some of the infrastructure needs and the Transportation Planner is scheduled to meet with the Town Administrator to talk about the town's transportation projects for the state's 10 year plan which may include sidewalk and road improvements which could go into the DOT plan. He said they wanted to get the EDC Chair's thoughts about where the committee wants to go and how he can help them meet their goals in conjunction with what the Planning Board is putting forth.

Mr. King said he thought these are good things for them to work on as the town needs to get some of those funds to improve the sidewalks, streetscapes and traffic calming devices which would make it more desirable to be downtown and be a benefit to the community.

He said the infrastructure under the road needs to be revisited and it is some of the oldest stuff we have. He said the previous plan could be improved to increase the chances of being accepted for a grant.

Mr. Pimental said they talked about the previous TAP (Transportation Alternatives Program) grant application that was submitted which was ranked as one of the highest in the region but was not funded and that no projects were funded in this region. He said that may be due to that the DOT may have wanted to award the money elsewhere in the state and that the Town didn't have the matching portion of the grant ready which would have had to have been approved at Town Meeting. He said there may be other funding opportunities such as the

undesignated fund balance and for the town to start thinking about having the match ready for when grant opportunities become available.

Mr. Pimental said they also talked about getting some of these things into the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and to try to move the economic development forward in conjunction with what the Planning Board is trying to do with changing the zoning ordinance specifically for the Village Center District.

Economic Luncheon -He said that Farmington will host a brown bag luncheon with many of the Economic Development Directors in the region this Thursday to share what they are working on and what has been successful as a peer-to-peer learning opportunity. He said he would bring back the results of the meeting to the board at their next meeting.

Brown Fields Funding -Mr. Pimental said that Senior Regional Planner James Burdin informed him that there is a potential for the Town to receive brown fields funding that may be used to assess the old fire dept. site and determine if a cleanup is needed.

He said that the foam used by most fire depts. has been a topic of discussion and getting the property ready to remove the existing building and redeveloped it may need a Phase 1 assessment. The only hang-up might be that they want the town to have a developer in place before they start the cleanup process and the town is not quite there yet. The staff is going to review the RFP and they may have to add language that says the Town will take some responsibility for the cleanup if it is deemed necessary he said.

Mr. King asked for the estimated cost for that assessment.

Mr. Pimental estimated that it would be around \$20,000. He said there is no match involved in these funds and Farmington has had success in using this fund before at the old garage on Spring Street where some underground tanks were removed and the site was cleaned up. He said he would keep the board updated as they move forward with these items.

Mr. King asked if there was anything in the zoning amendments the board needs to address.

Mr. Pimental said the Town Attorney worked on the final language for the warrant articles and today was the deadline to submit the proposed amendments to the Town Clerk's Office which was done. He said everything was good to go and the only thing left between now and Town Meeting was to do some sort of outreach to voters and let them know what is on the warrant for zoning amendments this year.

Master Plan Update:

ADG Managing Partner Stuart Arnett congratulated the board for getting all of the proposed zoning amendments included on the Town Meeting warrant for this year after missing the deadline by a few days last year.

Mr. Arnett said the chance of getting a CDBG grant for the downtown might be higher if they could show the action at the old fire dept. site as a job creator or a housing creator. If you could

say the reuse of the lot is tied into an infrastructure need makes it that much better he said.

Mr. King asked how they could make that proposal when there is no contract or agreement.

Mr. Arnett said it would be hard and asked if anyone was seriously looking at the site.

Mr. Johnson said there are currently no leads on the site.

Mr. Arnett asked if there was a way they could have a standby authorization to expend money for a match during the year such as a budget line item that would allow expenditure of up to \$50,000 for a grant match if needed. There could be other provisions that say there has to be so many dollars coming from grant money for every \$1 from the Town and that the Selectmen must approve it he said.

Mr. King asked Mr. Johnson if they could have a warrant article asking the voters to authorize the Selectmen to use the undesignated fund balance for a match to a grant.

Mr. Johnson said they could not do so at this point because the deadline for submission of Town warrant articles was 2 weeks ago.

Mr. Arnett said it would also be good to have the engineering plan ready for the infrastructure needs because every so often some funding becomes available for a shovel ready project.

He then turned to the handouts he gave to the board and said that one of them was the cover of a report from the NH Dept. of Revenue Administration (DRA) which has several pages of equalized valuations for all 277 towns in the state. He said Farmington's equalized tax rate for 2018 is \$21.83 and the Town is ranked 123rd from the top and you want to be #1 because that is the lowest rate. He said if they wanted a sense of where the Town is competitively to look at Claremont which is dead last with a full value tax rate about twice that of Farmington.

He said the Town is in the middle as far as the tax rate and a little lower than middle for household income. The reason it is not the same as the Assessor's number is because equalized value means that if DRA said you were at 100% value here's what the rate would really be. The information comes from the towns as reported annually on their report to DRA he said.

Mr. Arnett said the second handout is a 3 page summary of the most and least important questions of the 47 questions in the Master Plan Survey and visual display boards at Hay Day. He said the first page contains color-coded responses in green (high ranked for importance) and red (low rank for importance). He said the second page shows the results of the citizen responses from one of the display boards at Hay Day asking what they would like to see in the future. The third page shows the responses from the second display board at Hay Day asking where people wanted to see public infrastructure (investments priorities chart) he said.

Mr. King asked Mr. Arnett to go over the significance of the red numbers on page 1.

Mr. Arnett said there were 4 sections in the survey and asked the board to note the drop in the number of responders who completed each section and the increase in the number of people who skipped each section: # Completed: section A – 596, section B -541, section C – 539, section D – 531; #Skipped: section A – 5, section B-60, section C – 62, section D -70. He said they think that happened because when some people filled out the survey online they assumed

there was only one section and stopped at section A.

He said the "Q" with a number next to it refers to the question number on the survey and the responses are ranked in the next 2 columns in percentages not numbers. For example, the first question, Q6 asked if the town should be more business friendly and get more private investments and 94% said that was important and 5% ranked it as not important he said.

Mr. Arnett said the first 3 or 4 questions in each section are listed in order of the highest percentages of importance (shown in green) and the remaining questions are listed in order of the percentage ranked as not important (shown in red).

Mr. King asked if Q3 (housing at both street and upper levels) was referring to the downtown and asked about the ranking of the responses.

Mr. Arnett said he believed the question refers to the downtown and that 11% of the people ranked it as important and 83% said it is not important.

He said that section A looks at the bigger picture and that the following sections are more focused on certain chapters in the Master Plan.

Mr. Arnett said Mr. Pimental told him that 4 people from the business community attended one of the Public Hearings and said they had not seen the survey so they mailed them a paper copy of the survey and the online link to the survey so they have had at least 2 bites of the apple since then. The surveys go to our contractor in Maine so I don't know if they did the survey or not he said.

He said that with 47 areas on the survey they are trying to get to 5 to 10 action steps that we want to say are the most important and call out the ones ranked not too high up so that they could see the similarities. He said there were a lot of comments in all of the sections and that 90% of them were constructive and they didn't have to redact much from the comments.

Mr. Arnett said that the "Inside the Village Center" section on the display board was the top priority at Hay Day with 63 responses. He said each person was given 5 stickers and 223 total votes were cast so that means that 45 people voted.

Mr. King read that the individual category with the most votes was a sidewalk café w/ outdoor seating at 26 votes, #2 was bike & walking trails at 19 votes, #3 (tied) was a park with concert/performance venue and small local businesses with 14 votes, #4 was varied storefronts at 13 votes and # 5 is mixed use with residential above and shops and businesses below with 12 votes.

Mr. Arnett said it was rather consistent through the survey that the respondents want businesses on the first floor downtown. He said he didn't think that placement on the board made much of a difference and that although your eye is drawn toward the center of the board the category in the center (commercial office/business space with attention to exterior design) got zero votes.

Mr. King said one of the categories under "Town Streetscapes" is raised crosswalks and asked if this meant the texture and how prevalent this is in New Hampshire.

Mr. Arnett said he thought it means a difference in the surfacing of the crosswalk and the picture used showed an example of the texture not speed bumps.

Mr. Pimental said it could be either the texture of the paint or that the pavement is slightly elevated within the crosswalk. He said that Newmarket has one with the raised surface.

Mr. Arnett said some of the back streets in Concord have some raised crosswalks that look like table tops and also act as speed bumps in some of the neighborhoods there.

Mr. Bridges said the raised surface makes the crosswalks more visible to drivers because the edges are higher and their headlights hit the edges more directly.

Mr. Arnett said the last page is where people thought there should be future investment priorities. He said they asked people to pick a first and a second priority using green and orange stickers. The 2 columns on the right is where the most important categories were given a higher weight than the those ranked important but no matter how the votes were weighted it came out the same with "enhancing historic/cultural sites and venues" in first place and "infrastructure (water/sewer) to support economic development initiatives/business growth" coming in second. This chart had a substantially lower number of responses (27 total votes cast) which was probably due to the respondents being more engaged in the downtown and what they want for the future there than in investment priorities in the middle of Hay Day he said.

Mr. King said he found it surprising that the Transit Services (i.e. Coast Bus) category didn't rank very high in priority and was among the lowest priority (5th place with 1 vote for first priority).

Mr. Arnett noted there were some differences in voting on the same topic such as where bike trails and other trails ranked high (P.2, 2nd place on the Visual Survey-Town Recreation) and comes in next to last on the second Visual Survey (p. 3, investment priorities, bike access and safety). The first visual survey was more of a visioning thing and the second one was more about where we should spend our money he said.

Mr. Pimental noted that the participants were only given 2 stickers to vote with on the second visual survey as opposed to being given 5 stickers to vote with for the first visual survey. This doesn't say transit services isn't important it's just not the most important to put money toward he said.

Mr. Arnett said there was also a third visual survey chart that went deeper into these issues and it only received 2 votes the whole day so they decided not to include it with the responses.

Mr. Arnett said the Selectmen agreed to extend the contract through the end of the calendar year and everything is on schedule. He said they want to "put the pedal to the metal" on the narratives to be included in the Master Plan and asked the board to what degree they want the Master Plan to look at continuing Farmington how it's going versus being a statement of a changing Farmington. We see a lot of comments from the public in the survey saying that it's a good place to live but there are things they would like to see more of such as downtown vitality, density and the things you are working on with the zoning he said.

Mr. King asked if he was asking if they want content of the plan to lead where the results is

pointing.

Mr. Arnett said there are results from other data as well and that pretty soon the board will need to let them know if they are comfortable with where they are going and what they are starting to recommend.

Mr. King said when the board gets those recommendations they will let him know.

Mr. Arnett said they are trying to build on the town's strengths- a natural background, a solid work force, proximity to expensive markets while Farmington is not, the commercial corridor on Route 11, an attractive Village Center with great bones and the ability to bring in commercial investment.

Mr. King said that the downtown has some vacancies but if he was to go to Rochester we look good. The amendments to zoning is an attempt to make it a little more financially viable for commercial investment but it is up to them as changing the zoning will not have any impact unless people pony up with their blood, sweat and money or nothing will change he said.

Mr. Arnett said SRPC has been doing a great job of putting some maps together and they are working on a ton of data since the last time this was originally discussed. We are going to try to have a lot of things in the plan that are not the full report but will include online links to full reports so we can keep the plan skinny and usable he said.

He said the next things they want to work on with the board are the implementable pieces which are the action steps. He said at that point they will need to start thinking about a half dozen things the community can focus on that are the most important.

Mr. King said he thought they are there and pointed out the top questions in each section of the survey responses shows that half of it they didn't really care about and half of it they did (care about). I think that boils it down to those areas he said.

Mr. Arnett said because there were 47 questions in the survey the middle of was left out of the summary of the responses. He said he wanted to be able to show them that if someone said the town is fine as it is and there is no need to change you can go down to question #37 and say that 86% of the people say that is not correct so you don't have to keep arguing the same thing over and over.

Mr. King said section D (P. 1, Quality of Life) the top 3 answers could be boiled down into 1 bullet point because they all have to do with growth and adding commercial/industrial development.

Mr. Arnett said this clearly says they want to go forward in a good way in the same way that question #37 says the people do not want to stay at the status quo.

Mr. King said that based upon question #28 the town needs to find a way to brand itself (83% said it's very important, 11% said it's not important).

Mr. Arnett said he has a couple of ideas for this in his recommendations and that he would let the board read them and see what they think.

Mr. Fisher said he thought it would be "cool" if the town could be a recreational area for the

state where there is Blue Job Mountain with nice trails to walk and if we had a larger ATV trail system around town they could come in and do more riding, camping, hiking and fishing. He said the Conservation Commission tried to put in a handicapped fishing area and that he planned to discuss the potential to use the Spring Street property Mr. Pimental mentioned as a possible location for the handicapped fishing spot with the Con Com.

Mr. Arnett said they are in a position to take advantage of the location of the VC with amenities and affordability and the farming, natural resources and the positives that come from having a farming history that is part of the attraction of the town. He said that with so many people looking at where their food is coming from and looking at from farm to table and organic produce, you have a 200 year history of successful farming and its roots in farming and the soil. Mr. Pimental said he would forward Mr. Arnett's memo with his recommendations and his response to it to the board.

Chairman King said he thought the board needs to get a little more "dialed in" on what the impact of the density change could be and the parking portion of the site plan review regulations before Town Meeting.

Mr. Pelkey asked when the Master Plan would be vetted by the public before the board approves it and if it a draft version would be available for review at Town Meeting.

Mr. Arnett said they have the plan coming back to the board 2 months in a row with a draft and then the final version. He said the board talked about holding another outreach event but at a recent Selectmen's meeting there was some discussion that a lot of that has already been done. He said it would be fine with him if they don't hold another public meeting as there has been plenty of that going back to UNH interviews and the surveys.

Mr. Pelkey said and yet they have a public meeting where business owners said they didn't know about it or have a chance to participate in it.

Mr. Johnson said the Town Administrator personally handed out copies of the surveys to the business owners in the downtown. He said they were also available at various locations around town.

Mr. Bridges suggested for future reference there should be a way to involve business owners.

Mr. Arnett said he was glad they were able to reach those owners and that on the survey the business responses were pretty important. The surveys recognized their worth for sure he said. He said the survey site is live so people can fill it out right up to last minute.

Chairman King thanked Mr. Arnett for attending the meeting and providing the update.

Next Meeting -Mr. Pimental said there are no open applications at this point and asked the board if they wished to have a discussion on a specific topic at the Feb. 17th meeting or cancel the meeting. He said the only topics on the agenda right now would be the review of minutes and a discussion of Mr. Arnett's memo with his recommendations.

Mr. King asked if it would be possible to discuss recommended changes to the parking regulations at that meeting. He said they should do their homework and have an approach that

shows they have weighed the plusses and minuses on how it should work and how people may try to work around the parking situation.

Mr. Pimental said they could hold a workshop where he would bring some ideas and let the board react to them. He said he would also update the board on the results of the economic development luncheon and there may be a conceptual discussion if the person gets back in contact with the Planning Dept. Office.

New Members Needed – Chairman King said there is 1 vacant seat for a full time regular member and vacant seats for alternates available. Applications are available on the Town website or at the Municipal Office Building he said.

Adjournment:

Motion: (Johnson, second Bridges) to adjourn the meeting passed 5-0 at 7:22 p.m.

Respectively submitted
Kathleen Magoon
Recording Secretary



Charlie King, Chairman