

Historic District Commission
Town Hall, Room 126
Final Meeting Minutes, June 19, 2014

Meeting called to order at 7:30 PM. Attending: Kathy Acerbo-Bachman (KAB; chair), David Honn (DH), Ron Regan (RR), Anita Rogers (AR), and David Shoemaker (DS; note-taker).

7:30pm **Citizen's Questions/Comments**
None. Discussion of the night's agenda; need for feedback on minutes.
Hold previous minute approval for July 8.

Ron Regan recuses himself.

7:35 **Parcel 137-1** (to the west of 540 Mass Ave., behind 542 Mass Ave.)
There is not yet an application, but we wish to consider if a Public Meeting is required. Have required Public Meetings for construction of new homes. From the street it is minimally visible.
DH: Will become more visible once the trees come down.
DS: concerns for neighbors; they should be informed.
AR: wish to strive for consistency in our approach. The front façade will be visible from the reference street. Garage doors will be problematic; a carriage house approach would be one way to successfully integrate the façade in the built environment.
DH: gable ends dominate in nearby buildings. Firehouse another model, or 'chauffeur's apartment'. A variety of older utility buildings with garages below living space exist as models. Consider special permit for a single building for 4 units, or split unit with one driveway.
DS: Advantages for all that the applicant comes to us soon with a provisional application to discuss designs before they are final, and to get the public meeting process underway minimizing delays.

Vote: unanimous in favor of a public meeting should an application arrive.

RR rejoins the committee

7:45

Topic: Follow-up on previous applications

18-20 School St, Application #1348: Will check up on progress in addressing the need to replace windows with approved wooden windows.

102 Main St: Vinyl windows, stair, door: Need to check on due date and progress. The HDC must choose to recommend or not that the building department should impose fines. The committee reviewed the history of this topic, and previous discussions. KAB requests the agreement of the HDC members to contact the building department for consideration of imposing fines if deadlines pass without resolution. Unanimous agreement.

82 River (Habitat House): Abutters present in the HDC, and if recused the quorum would not exist, thus no discussion at this meeting. Pam Lynn to follow up.

24-24 River Street, Application #1218: Ongoing issue with a Satellite Dish. In 2012, re-roofing led to placement of a satellite dish in a visible and disallowed position. In December 2013, the issue remained, and the owner said that it would be correctly moved once a January 2014 date passed. Visual inspection shows that the dish is still installed in a disallowed position.

Neon Signs appearing esp. in West Acton: Frank Ramsbottom is undertaking a tour of businesses to inform them of the signage rules.

Discussion of needed abutters notices.

8:00

268 Central: Replacement of Clapboards. Probably a CNA; RR is Liaison, and will follow through with the paperwork.

8:03

Scott Kutil on Zoning.

Goals: 1) complete review of data; have already seen a subset; will present and summarize. 2) Review recommendations for proposed optimized zoning. Top-level goal: Wish the HDC to sponsor zoning changes for discussion at a Town Meeting.

KAB: believes the next meeting opportunity will be in April 2015. Leads to a need for discussion with Planning in August or September, then on to town Counsel.

SK: Sees getting selectmen and planning board in favor is the key starting point to gain support in greater citizenry. The argument in favor is that the current zoning is in conflict with the objective and statutes of historic preservation.

KAB: Need to find a way to make it clear why citizens should support this; that a streetscape that people love will be preserved via this change.

AR: The density that is allowed on Windsor Ave is greater than most any other part of the town. Homeowners should be aware that there could be building close to their homes with present zoning, and changes will protect them.

DH: Need an illustration of what Windsor Ave *could* look like if the present zoning were fully built out; and the cars. Needs to be an engaging graphic.

AR: Need to find empathy among a broad range of citizens.

KAB: Original zoning was for encouragement to higher density of smart growth and for cash flow. Hoped to lead to diversification of the tax base.

DH: Hammerhead lots are another issue for Acton (the only town in Massachusetts allowing them).

KAB: Only concern is the amount of work needed to succeed at this endeavor.

SK: happy to contribute at any level of effort.

KAB: Suggest to start with Planning leadership. Roughly seven steps of presentations to committees, and preparation of special-purpose documents.

SK: Acton 2020 is aware of the initiative; complex balance between preservation and the need for preservation of historic character.

DH: This will be a change of course for zoning, but one informed by 25 years of experience, and we can re-assess in the present environment.

KAB: The concept of villages is very attractive in principle and it is seen as encouraging growth, but the quarter-century experiment has played out with more or less success.

SK: Has presented to planning board; they understand and appreciate the arguments.

KAB: strong argument for the Planning board to reduce the number of

one-off permit activities by having defaults that match the permits to come. Also, the clarity for builders and others will be welcome. Nice to align HDC and Zoning for applicants, reduces bad surprises.

AR: Sees the friction between developers who make false starts and the HDC as something that could be eliminated with proper zoning.

DH: Homeowners and developers really want clarity, and removes an apparent capriciousness of an HDC process. Also the town can find savings in reduction of staff – and counsel – in attention to resolving conflicts.

AR: The onus is on the zoning professionals to bring the zoning into alignment with the HDC rules.

SK: Counsel has expressed interest in the issue.

KAB: Will also set a meeting first with Roland. Then, Counsel; should be brought to counsel by HDC members. KAB to look into meetings, both in early September. Then Planning committee. Design Review board also valuable – can put the notion into context, and Acton 2020. Selectmen in October, so that beginning of December all can be in place, reviewed, accepted.

SK: Memos will be timely once the initial meetings are completed. Need to find an approach to creating graphics

SK: Circulated a proposed zoning sheet. Data grouped by existing zoning. Have 4 zoning districts, allowing comparisons. Most districts were in place before Historic Districts created. WAV created afterward, but without consideration of the Historic Districts. The Districts all have a common format: Houses around a non-residential center, surrounded by residences. All HD coalesce around values of 75% open area, and a FAR of 0.2; wish to relax from this a bit, allowing most homeowners to expand. With the 65% and 0.25 FAR, a developer who builds to these limits will be building something still consistent with the HD texture.

South Acton zoned for business, but no new business development in some time. To establish a good zoning model, large buildings were removed and additional antique houses included to improve the sample of buildings. Character is really not commercial, but residential, and the zoning should comply. Recommended zoning is more like the zoning active at the time of creation of the HD, but inconsistent with the present zoning.

SK gave a careful tour of the data from Acton Center as an example, and this motivated the recommended zoning for Acton Center.

Great appreciation for Scott Kutil's investment of time, energy, and creativity was expressed by all members of the HDC present at the meeting.

9:37 The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

David Shoemaker acting as Secretary