

Finance Committee

Meeting Minutes

January 26, 2021

7:00 PM

* VIRTUAL MEETING *

Present: Christi Andersen (Chair), Roland Bourdon, Jason Cole, Esha Gangolli (Associate), Mike Majors, Adam Nolde, Steve Noone, Sahana Purohit, Christine Russell (Vice-Chair), David Wellinghoff

Ms. Andersen called the meeting to order at 7:02 PM via a virtual meeting with no Committee members in physical attendance and broadcasted via Zoom and ActonTV.

1. Citizen's Concerns

None

2. Kmart Parcel Update

Selectman Benson reviewed recent developments regarding the Kmart parcel. Colonial Group withdrew their interest in the property. Ocean State Job Lot issued a letter of intent to utilize 40,000sq.ft. of the existing building and rent or use as storage the remainder. Town staff met with Ocean State Job Lot. Ocean State Job Lot later withdrew their letter of intent. Selectman Benson reviewed other potential uses for the parcel such as; senior living, life sciences facility, mixed use and the town purchasing the parcel. Selectman Benson expressed the viability of retail and restaurant space in light of COVID and the community response of interest in other discount retailers.

Ms. Purohit read her response to a Facebook post. (see attached)

Mr. Majors expressed that a discount retailer would be better suited on route 2A and recommends hiring an urban planner to assess the best use for the parcel

Mr. Bourdon commented that larger discount retailers would require a larger building and more parking

Mr. Wellinghoff opposed the Town purchasing the parcel and expressed concerns about chasing away discount retailers

Mr. Cole asked what the current real estate tax are and what would the delta be given the different uses suggested.

Finance Director, Mr. Barrett responded that the valuation would remain the same unless substantial improvements were done as part of the reuse of the parcel.

Mr. Cole expressed concerns that an urban planner would recommend mixed use and would not incorporate the impact on the school district and traffic as part of their assessment. Mr. Cole does not support the Town purchasing the parcel.

Mr. Noone does not believe Ocean State Job Lot would do major improvement and would not support the Towns purchase of the parcel.

Mr. Cole expressed that there is no urgency in the situation since we are currently receiving real estate payments.

Ms. Andersen does not support the Town purchasing the parcel.

Ms. Russell reminded members that during the Kelleys Corner update the Town said there would be no zoning changes and the Town should not now explore options that would require such changes.

Mr. Bourdon mentioned other retail spaces that are currently vacant and that care should be taken before turning down retail options.

Mr. Majors agreed with Mr. Cole to not rush into a decision. The use of an urban planner could reflect the criteria of the Acton 2020 plan. Mr. Majors gave statistics on the commercial vacancy rate between Brooks St. and the Concord, MA line along route 2A.

3. ALG Update

Ms. Andersen presented the POV at the ALG meeting and it was well received. ALG members commented on the median household income needs confirmation. Ms. Russell talked about the census change that caused the decrease. Census data changed from median family income to median household income. Comparable numbers are not yet available.

Ms. Andersen gave a preview of the FY2021 Q2 report that Finance will present on February 9, 2021. Ms. Andersen reported that the school expects state assistance for pooled COVID testing. Mr. Cole reported that the school building guaranteed maximum price came in under budget, allowing for the contingency fund to be replenished. Ms. Andersen reported that the schools expect an additional \$400k in CARES funds. The Board of Selectmen has set Annual Town Meeting for Monday June 21, 2020. The school budget vote will be in March to accommodate Boxborough's Town Meeting.

4. Point of View

Ms. Russell explained the year to year decrease of the median household income was due to census changes, previously the median family income was provided. Ms. Russell asked for feedback about removing the slide altogether or removing the FY2020 column.

Mr. Bourdon suggested added and additional line for median household income and leaving the existing numbers on the median family income line, which will fall off over time as future years of median household income become available.

Ms. Russell will make such changes to the slide and the corresponding Takeaways slide

Mr. Cole moved to approve the POV as amended. Mr. Noone seconded. Ms. Andersen called the roll:

Ms. Russell – aye
Mr. Majors – aye
Mr. Nolde – aye
Mr. Noone – aye
Mr. Bourdon – aye
Ms. Purohit – aye
Mr. Cole – aye
Mr. Wellinghoff – aye
Ms. Andersen – aye
The Committee voted 9-0, the motion carried

5. Meeting Minutes

Ms. Andersen presented the minutes from October 27, 2021.

Mr. Bourdon moved to approve the minutes of October 27 2021. Ms. Russell seconded. Ms. Andersen called the roll:

Ms. Russell – aye
Mr. Majors – aye
Mr. Nolde – aye
Mr. Noone – aye
Mr. Bourdon – aye
Ms. Purohit – aye
Mr. Cole – aye
Mr. Wellinghoff – aye
Ms. Andersen – aye
The Committee voted 9-0, the motion carried

6. Liaison Reports

Mr. Cole had no committee reports. Commented that the Finance Committee should receive the Town budget by April 12, 2021 and members should be thinking about what budget section they would like to review and such assignments should be on a future Finance Committee agenda

Mr. Purohit reported on the Board of Selectmen's meeting, highlighting:

- Town received MMA innovation award for their commitment to help small businesses
- Town issued the last of the liquor licenses
- Town received \$7,500 grant for an adaptive bike program
- Acton and Concord regional dispatch still being discussed
- Andrea Becerra has join the Town as Sustainability Director
- Selectmen Gardner will resign, effective following the FY 2021 Annual Town Meeting
- CPC projects were review and prioritized in the following order: dog park, sports pavilion, gardner field and jones playground
- WR grace solar farm public forum to be held February 3, 2021 at 7pm
- Annual Town Meeting has been set of Monday June 21, 2021
- Town budget and capital improvement plan will be presented March 1, 2021

Ms. Russell reported on the School Committee, highlighting:

- Schools budget schedule
- Decline in revenue will result in increased assessments
- Health Insurance and Middlesex Retirement costs are expected to increase, 6.8% and 11.8% respectively. Middlesex's increase is due to 2019 hiring of bus drivers
- Salaries will be increasing at 4%
- A level service budget would be a 3.73% increase, using \$1m of E&D
- Projected revenue losses in transportation aid, due to current year reducing bussing
- \$2.5m of CARES funding has been committed for use

Mr. Andersen reported on the Kelleys Corner Steering Committee, highlighting:

- Sidewalk lighting estimates came in at approx. \$1m
- \$450k of funds available from prior project authorizations
- State will not pay for sidewalk lighting wiring now for future installation

Mr. Nolde moved to adjourn. Mr. Noone seconded. Ms. Andersen called the roll:

Ms. Russell – aye

Mr. Majors – aye

Mr. Nolde – aye

Mr. Noone – aye

Mr. Bourdon – aye

Ms. Purohit – aye

Mr. Cole – aye

Mr. Wellinghoff – aye

Ms. Andersen – aye

The Committee voted 9-0, the motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 8:22

Statement by Ms. Purohit

“I wanted to clarify on a Facebook post that I was called on last night after I made a comment on the K-Mart parcel at the board meeting. Unfortunately I feel social media has become a toxic place especially during this pandemic and I do not like to indulge in conversations on FB unless it’s on my

own page and personally, I like to keep social media light and for fun.

I reached out to our planning director Kristen Guichard today for help in finding some of these documents.

I was asked where the survey results were posted. Let me make it vety clear here- I did not say there

was any formal survey that was conducted about the current redevelopment ideas.

First, I served on the Acton 2020 Committee and one of our primary tasks was public outreach.

During

the outreach phase, time and time again, revitalizing Kelley’s Corner rose to the top of conversations.

The Acton 2020 Plan was successfully adopted by the Planning Board and Town Meeting in 2012. In

the Plan, it clearly states that a high priority action item is to redevelop Kelley’s Corner into a mixeduse

town center. The Acton 2020 website details all the extensive public outreach conducted.

Action Item 1.2.2.1: Redevelop Kelley’s Corner Develop Kelley’s Corner (KC) into a mixed use town

center and transportation hub. Prepare a Development Plan for Kelley’s Corner as part of the Key

Centers Plan. I implementation. acton2020.info/node/305

Based on the directive from the approved Acton 2020 Master Plan, the Town took the next step and

created the Kelley’s Corner Improvement Initiative Plan through multiple years of public outreach.

Based on public feedback at in-person forums and community wide surveys, the majority of the participants favored mixed-use, followed secondly by a commercial and retail center. The third alternative option that was the “baseline approach”, essentially “no change,” received the fewest responses. The Plan is available online along with all the documented public outreach conducted. acton-ma.gov/dswebNiew/Collection-7424

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Second, I have helped extensively in the outreach for the KC infrastructure project along with others.

As I mentioned last night, we did a grassroots outreach to most people in town. We were invited to

make presentations on the infrastructure plan. There was a lot of talk regarding the K-Mart parcel.

People over the years have indicated a desire for KC to be more walkable, safer, and make it a place

with character. People want a safe place for their children to walk up to after school. It certainly has a lot of potential if we can attract the right developers that can bring about the vision that the Town has stated in its planning documents. But like Selectman Benson noted, the retail climate has changed a lot especially during this pandemic. I hear others who mentioned that they would like to see a big box store in Acton. I can tell you that my father, when he was alive and was living with us, always liked to shop at K-Mart. There have always been some residents in the community who did not support any development and wanted to keep Kmart as is, but it is important to acknowledge what the community has adopted through formal rigorous public outreach processes and adopted plans. Just to keep my own sanity I will not be checking every message on every FB group. My only request is for folks to do their own research before commenting and not assume that everything they read on social media is a fact”