

Planning Board Meeting Minutes

Benjamin Eddy Bldg., 6 South Killingly Road
Wednesday, April 5, 2023

A. Call to Order

Anthony Renzi called the meeting to order at 7:04 PM.

B. Roll Call

Planning Board Members: Mike Carpenter; Warren Ducharme; Bill Gibb; Susan Joyce; David Paolissi; Anthony Renzi; Secretary, Hilary Downes-Fortune.

Excused: None.

Staff present: Grant McGregor, Planner; Joanna Achille, Solicitor

Public present: Ronald Cervasio, Lynne Rider, Patty Moreau; Bob Moreau; Tosh Fountain; Tammy Steinkamp (Recreation Director); George Gearing

C. Approval of Minutes

Mr. Renzi asked for a motion to approve the March 1, 2023 minutes. Mr. Carpenter made the motion; Mr. Gibb seconded. No discussion. Motion passed 7-0.

Mr. Renzi asked for a motion to approve the March 22, 2023 minutes. Ms. Joyce made the motion; Mr. Carpenter seconded. No discussion. Motion passed 7-0.

D. Pre-Application Meeting – Residential Compound (Minor Subdivision)

Applicant: Ron Cervasio; Owner: Ronald F. Cervasio and Rita F. DiMartino

Applicant is requesting opinion regarding Foster Code of Ordinances Section 38-356 (b)(1) pertaining to continuous ownership of property.

Mr. Cervasio began with a history of his property back to when it was part of the King's Grant. He said he has owned his 31-acre property (Plat 3, Lot 9) for 33 years, and he also owns the adjacent Plat 6, Lot 22. He recently purchased two more lots along Old Plainfield Pike, Plat 6, Lots 23 and 23A. Mr. Cervasio stated that he wants to develop a residential compound on the newly created 30-acre lot next to the old bobbin mill formed by merging and then subdividing the lots. However, according to the town ordinance lots must be owned for at least 5 years in order to create a residential compound.

Ms. Achille explained that the Planning Board can't make this determination. Since he hasn't even submitted an application, the Planning Board can't recommend a variance or

even a waiver. Mr. Ducharme added that the zoning opinion has to come from the zoning official and an appeal would go to Zoning.

E. Results of Economic Development Plan Presentation by Camoin Associates

Adoption as the Town's official economic development plan

Mr. Renzi asked for Planning Board members to share their thoughts on the Camoin presentation at the last meeting.

Mr. Ducharme stated that the plan contained some new ideas and some areas that we have jurisdiction over. He discussed zoning and noted there are still some large lots along Route 6. He also mentioned the possibility of developing recreational sites along the North-South Trail. Mr. Ducharme said he thought that an industrial park, if done right, would benefit the town, and he noted that we need to address residential zoning issues, including residential compounds.

Mr. Gibb said he thought it was a great presentation, but he thinks no business will want to come to Foster because the residential density is too low. He said signs and cleaning up Route 6 isn't going to bring in business, and we need residential development to increase tax revenue. He also said we should not be bringing in people for recreation ex. ATV's because that increases the need for police, rescue, etc.

Mr. Carpenter stated that he thought not everyone had the chance to read the entire report, but he did since he wasn't at the presentation. He said the biggest job the planning board will have will be implementation. He shared with us notes he made during his review of the economic development plan that he had shared previously with Mr. McGregor and Mr. Renzi. Highlights included:

- Executive Summary: "A balance between growth and preservation"
 - 1) Make US Route 6 and Highway 101 look better by enforcing the law.
 - 2) Direct Commercial growth to specific areas by managing zoning and providing incentives.
 - 3) Ensure residents' vision of Foster is realized by reading the Planning Board's updates on the Economic Development Commission (EDC) into the Town Council meeting minutes every quarter and publishing them in the FHJ.
- Key Findings: "A declining, old population with 1.5 times average state income that must go out of town for most goods and services"

- 1) Provide goods and services for the 94% A/R population through town funding to encourage retail, entertainment, and recreational development.
 - 2) Keep good business—less costly to retain good businesses than to replace, such as Backdraft Cafe, Black Forest Farm and Nancy Ann (nursing home); EDC needs to monitor threatened businesses and develop action plans.
 - 3) Use the best resources available; incentives to recognize successful businesses such as 10% tax reduction and advertisement on “Welcome to Foster, Home of...” signs.
- Investment Opportunities: “Foster is the ideal location for connecting electric cars with mass transit”
 - 1) Make Foster a must stop location by enhancing mass transit service by combining bus service with electric car charging facility, food service and a convenience store, with free parking for day and overnight security.
 - 2) Expand innovative services by partnering with Trauma Centers to provide Med-evac facility, encouraging “Foster Bottled Water”, university campus extension, luxury day care/assisted living.

Ms. Downes Fortune said that at a recent Women in Agriculture Conference she learned that there are new farms being developed in Foster. She said we need to encourage agriculture and forestry businesses in town and promote agrotourism through vineyards, brewpubs, CSA’s, etc. Mr. Cervasio noted that the town needs profitable businesses, because the tax rate is the same for yarn shops and farms.

Ms. Joyce stated that she has read the entire report and the Planning Board’s next steps are to address zoning and conduct a cost/benefit analysis for new businesses. We need to attract people to town for specific reasons such as recreation, farm products, etc. Ms. Joyce also noted that we need better communication with townspeople through Facebook and the town website, and a review and update of codes is critically important.

Mr. Renzi stated that the full report needs to be posted online. He also said we need an official Town Facebook page to share information on but with no commenting allowed.

Patty Moreau (resident, Central Pike) said the #1 issue to address is zoning. Mr. Renzi said that will be discussed later in this meeting.

Lynne Rider (resident, Burgess Trail) said that the report is good, but we need to focus on what is most important to people, like Route 6, and we need to get goodwill and support from the town first. Ms. Rider noted that for an industrial park people don't need to live here but they do need a lunch place, etc. She said a high-end restaurant like Sharpe Hill Vineyard would benefit the town, and we need to look for grants to help the owners of businesses on Route 6 with their clean-ups. Ms. Moreau noted that the state has grants for this, and we need to talk to (State Rep.) Mike Chippendale.

Bob Moreau (resident, Central Pike) stated that this is the third time a plan has been presented to the town. Mr. Renzi replied that it comes back to the Town Council. Mr. Moreau said we each need to reach out to others in town to get support (for plan implementation).

Tosh Fountain (resident) stated that he has lived in town for 6 or 7 years and he works at an environmental testing lab in RI. He said he has children in the school system, and he plans to stay. He said forming an economic development council is important, as well as improving communication. Mr. Fountain also stated that we need to get more input from younger people in town. Ms. Moreau said we need to have meetings on Zoom, and several replied that it's coming.

Discussion ensued as to whether the Planning Board can vote to officially adopt or accept the plan and Ms. Achille stated that this is neither appropriate nor necessary.

F. Discussion with Recreation Committee on locations for recreational use

Mr. Renzi said he invited Ms. Steinkamp to the meeting to discuss potential recreational opportunities in town that could provide some income. He noted that there are horse trails in town and asked if we could have paid parking permits issued to use these trails, such as at the Hay Field Land Trust property. He also suggested developing and/or charging for use of mountain bike trails at Tom Woods Preserve.

Ms. Joyce mentioned the new Sundays on the Farm events at Borders Farm as a draw for out-of-towners.

George Gearing (resident, Mt. Hygeia Rd.) stated that he has lived in town for 27 years and spoke of the NIMBY (not in my backyard) attitude in town. He said no one is wrong about the need for development, and said we need a supermarket. Mr. Gearing said he loves downtown Chepachet as a model, as well as the South Kingstown Bike Path,

Whalers Brewhouse, the Peacedale Guild, and he also mentioned the Owen Bell Playground in Killingly as a recreational facility we should emulate.

Ms. Downes Fortune asked Ms. Steinkamp if a pickleball court would be constructed at the new Rec Field on Rte. 94 and was told no.

Mr. Ducharme stated that the residential zoning in town needs to be fixed, noting that 5 acres is required for a single-family home, 7.5 acres for a multi-family unit, and 30 acres for a residential compound of 3 houses.

G. Zoning Districts/Zoning Map: Discussion of current zoning districts and potential options for amendment(s) to zoning map for Route 6 and abutting parcels to enhance development.

Mr. Renzi began with a discussion about the potential use of floating zones. Mr. McGregor stated that a floating district is the same as spot zoning in that it can change based on the proposed use. Mr. Renzi said Route 6 is currently zoned A/R with some interspersed Commercial zoned properties. He would like to change the zoning on Route 6 to give owners the choice to keep or switch their properties' zoning.

Ms. Rider and Mr. Carpenter stated that the town did this about 15 years ago—owners were given 18 months to decide whether to switch. Mr. Ducharme noted that the intention back then was to take away people's ability to claim the town devalued their land by changing zoning to A/R. Mr. Renzi suggested the town give landowners the option to sell their A/R land for commercial development.

Ms. Moreau noted that the taxes stay the same for property under current zoning, then when the use changes the zoning and tax rate changes. Someone stated that Floating Zoning is not in the Comprehensive Plan, therefore we can't use it. Mr. Ducharme noted that we can have Mixed Use zoning with design standards and referenced the Rural Development Handbook.

Mr. Carpenter stated that the town has 13 parcels totaling 1,300 acres of existing unused properties, such as the 27-acre Sue-Ann Creations property. Ms. Downes Fortune asked if the town is looking into enforcing the Underutilized Properties regulations as was discussed previously. Ms. Rider said the Town Council said you can't put an additional tax burden on people like that.

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H. Adjournment

Mr. Renzi asked for a motion to adjourn. Mr. Paolissi made a motion to adjourn. Motion passed 7-0. Meeting adjourned at 9:20 PM.

Respectfully submitted.

Hilary Downes Fortune, Secretary