

Planning Board Special Meeting Minutes

Town of Foster

Capt. Isaac Paine Elementary School, 160 Foster Center Road

Wednesday, January 24, 2024

A. Call to Order

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

B. Roll Call

Planning Board Members: Warren Ducharme; Susan Joyce; Anthony Renzi; Secretary, Hilary Downes Fortune.

Excused: Mike Carpenter; Bill Gibb; David Paolissi

Staff present: Grant McGregor, Planner; Kelli Russ, Finance Director

Public present: Town Council members (Denise DeFranco, Heidi Rogers); Town department representatives (school department, public works, fire stations); town residents

C. Approval of Minutes

Mr. Renzi asked for a motion to approve the January 17, 2024 minutes. Ms. Joyce made the motion; Mr. Ducharme seconded. No discussion. Motion passed 4-0.

D. Libra Planners – Low- or Moderate-Income Housing presentation

- Presentation by Libra Planners (consultant contracted through RI Housing Municipal Technical Assistance Program) on Low- or Moderate-Income (LMI) Housing strategies.

Kim Salerno, Peter Friedrichs and Melissa Pattavina made the presentation to the town. They explained that the consulting work is funded by a surcharge on high cost real estate transactions. Highlights from their presentation:

- Affordable housing is an issue in every town, not just urban municipalities; housing costs are rising faster than income.
- They recognize the town's desire to protect its beauty and amenities.
- LMI is defined as income at or below 80% of the area median income; up to 30% for housing.
- The state has backed off on deed restrictions and allows multi-family dwellings.
- Libra will develop strategies compatible with Foster's character and present these at two public presentations. They will prepare a booklet and mapping of the selected strategies.
- Ms. Pattavina described nine Affordable Housing Typologies:
 - Adaptive Reuse (ex. Rehab of old mill buildings)
 - Accessory Dwelling Units
 - Village Centers (existing or newly created)
 - Infill Development

- The Missing Middle (between single-family homes and apartment buildings (ex. town houses)
- Mixed Use Development (residential dwelling in/on commercial property)
- Planned Unit Development (cluster subdivision, which has lower development costs)
- Manufactured Housing (on individual lots or housing parks)
- Inclusionary Zoning (bonus houses are allowed if affordable homes are included in a development)

A Question-and-Answer session followed the presentation, beginning with the planning board.

Mr. Ducharme said that they need to define the terms—median vs. mean—with numbers specific to the town. He asked where these numbers come from. Ms. Pattavina explained that Housing RI calculates the values for each municipality each year.

Mr. Ducharme noted that we do have some large underused properties on Route 6. He also noted that if you have an accessory dwelling unit and rent it to a family member it's not on record as LMI and therefore not counted (toward the town's percentage).

Public Q&A followed:

Lynne Rider made the following comments:

1. The consultants should drive around Foster without Grant; they need the backstory.
2. Regarding rental costs in Foster: the largest LMI rental place in town is Hemlock Village, which is subsidized and depresses the rental average.
3. Based on their numbers the median income families can't afford to live here, but we do.
4. Are LMI properties taxed lower/do they receive a tax break? New LMI housing will require an increase in services so will that increase taxes for the rest of us to make up for them?
5. Regarding services: other than Abbey Lane there are no public water or septic systems in town; and 80% of their typologies don't fit.

Dolores Issler said she and her husband are new to town; they own 10 acres and are planning to build and retire here. She said they are wondering where the town would be siting any of these options. She said she works with LMI people and Foster doesn't have any of the services that they would need/want, especially markets like a PriceRite.

Gordon Rogers made the following comments:

1. The town has provided density bonuses via the Family Compound ordinance; no one has ever taken advantage of this.
2. The State does allow some credit for ADU's; we have some in town but someone would have to track them down.
3. Foster did have mills but the Providence Water Supply Board dismantled and flooded them.
4. The 30-year deed restriction for LMI properties has been removed/modified by the state legislature(?).

5. Foster has large tracts of land (a benefit) but no public transit; mixed use development could solve the problem.

George Sackal asked if they have worked with any other municipalities like Foster. Ms. Salerno replied that the closest would be Exeter (the other municipalities they are working with are East Providence, Pawtucket, Newport and Barrington); they are also working with the Town of Charlestown on a non-LMI project. Mr. Sackal then asked if there are other entities besides RI Housing working on this LMI issue.

Mr. Ducharme noted that this situation is exacerbated by the state's 30% mandate. He also said that out here the expense for fire suppression and back-up generators to meet multi-unit dwelling regulations makes them not cost-effective.

Mr. McGregor stated that the limit for LMI housing is 80% of area median income for rentals and 120% for purchased. He said one possibility could be single-family homes on deed restricted land outside of the Scituate Reservoir watershed (with subsidies).

E. Capital Budget

- Planning Board collaboration with budget committee to prepare capital budget for Fiscal Year 2025 and update to six-year capital improvement program. Recommendations of capital project requests made by department heads.

Mr. Renzi invited School Department representatives to present their budget requests. Brendan Mara said there are two large projects this year (they will be seeking grants and state subsidies):

- a new well and water treatment system, due to PFAs detected in the well water; the cost will be \$675,000 over next two years.
- a new boiler room to replace the original, at a cost of \$500,000; the preliminary project design has been done.

Mr. Renzi asked about the generator, which had been discussed in past years as possibly needing replacement; Mr. Mara said they have been servicing it and it is fine for now. Ms. Russ stated that they have been carrying over money (\$371,669) in the budget in anticipation of these big projects.

Mr. Renzi asked if there were any representatives from the Engineering Board; none were present.

Mr. Renzi invited Chief Lindell of the Police Department to explain some of the budget items, specifically the \$19,000 for communications equipment. Ms. Russ explained that she had worked with Chief Lindell on the budget since it was her first time doing this. She said this is the annual cost for a 5-year lease of VHF equipment, after which they would have the option to purchase it or start a new lease.

Mr. Renzi commented that he still doesn't think it should be the Planning Board's job to review the capital budget. Ms. DeFranco said in the past the Planning Board made recommendations. Mr. Renzi replied that we need more than the one day we were given to review these requests in

order to make specific recommendations, even though in the past the Town Council ignored our recommendations. He noted that the department heads had a month to prepare and submit their budgets to the Planning Board.

Ms. Russ said that the town could fund the requests but she doesn't recommend it because it will leave the capital budget balance too low. She said she did bump the Engineering Department's budget from \$150,000 to \$175,000 but they didn't provide details for their budget request. Ms. Russ also noted that she has told them before that the town can't afford three fire stations. She said there is too much overlap of equipment, but none of the fire companies wants to shut down or merge with another fire company.

Ms. Joyce then asked about the Public Works budget, noting that of the \$680,000 total, \$400,000 is for paving. Ms. Russ said the paving amount is necessary, but the \$20,000 for the bridge and dam plan is not necessary because the state DOT can fund that. We also discussed the \$55,000 for the lighting engineering study. Ms. Rogers explained that the lighting is necessary for night-time football games. Ms. Russ added that this budget item is contingent on the town getting grant money to install the lights.

Mr. Rogers stood up to speak on behalf of the DPW budget requests but Mr. Renzi told him to sit down as he did not recognize Mr. Rogers as DPW Director since his contract was not renewed at the end of 2023. Discussion on this matter ensued for several minutes, until Mr. Ducharme stated that he was leaving the meeting and left.

Adjournment

Since there was no longer a quorum, Mr. Renzi adjourned the meeting at 9:05 PM. He said we will need to put off finishing the budget recommendations until the next meeting on 2/7, even though they will be late.

Respectfully submitted,

Hilary Downes Fortune, Secretary