

Johnson Planning Commission
Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, Feb 18, 2014
APPROVED

Present:

Planning Commission members: Bob Selby, David Butler (vice-chair), David Grozinsky, David Bergh, Cindy Hennard, Kim Dunkley.

Others: Don Blais, Diane Lehouillier, Lea Kilvadyova (Community & Economic Development Coordinator).

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

Call to Order

Bob Selby called the meeting to order at 7:03. David Grozinsky joined the meeting at 7:05.

Review and Approve Minutes of January 14

David Butler moved and Cyndi Hennard seconded the motion to approve the minutes of January 14 as amended by David Bergh. David Butler, David Bergh, Kim, Cindy and Bob voted to approve the minutes. David Grozinsky abstained. The motion passed.

Form Based Code article at Town Meeting

Don Blais and Diane Lehouillier came to speak with the Planning Commission about the possibility of working together on motivating voters at Town Meeting to vote "yes" for the expenditure of \$15,000 to hire a consultant for form based zoning. Diane suggested going through the voter checklist and make phone calls to people who might support the article.

Kim said that the people she would be comfortable calling are the people who came to the Trustee meeting a few months ago and verbalized their support for doing something about form based zoning. Bob asked how other Planning Commission members felt about the phone calls. David Bergh wondered how appropriate the phone calls are within the scope of the Planning Commission as opposed to individual members of the community. Kim and David Bergh felt that the Planning Commission's role is the one of raising awareness and education about the topic and their actions should be open to the whole community. David Butler was not sure that the Planning Commission should take a side on the issue and petition the public to vote yes. David Grozinsky thought that the calling should be done on an individual basis as residents having a stake in the matter. David Butler argued that it is a gray area and said that if one makes a phone call, the call will be viewed as coming from the Planning Commission. Bob said that during the previous round of developing a zoning plan there was a feeling that the Planning Commission was trying to impose zoning on the community. He felt that the whole reason that form based code effort exists is because the Planning Commission is responding to a citizen concern. Ben Waterman asked whether it would be helpful if the Planning Commission worked to simply raise awareness about the article. Kim said that the Planning Commission would be happy to put a blurb about the article to the Transcript, for example. Bob Selby said that what he wanted to discuss today

was not so much the promotion of the article but preparedness to answer questions about the article at Town Meeting. David Butler said that a concerned citizen can also post something on Front Porch Forum, since the forum is accessible to everyone.

Don Blais said that he had a good idea for why the form based code would work in the village but was not sure how it would apply to the town. Kim said that the relevance to the townspeople is that the village is our town center. David Butler said that form based code is not anti-development. The code supports development that is representative of the area of where the development is supposed to occur. Bob was not sure that the code would work as well in the town as it would in the village. It is very easy to identify form to the village and the maintenance of the look of a small New England rural town is something that can be codified. The difficulty is that the village cannot - on its own -administratively sustain the implementation of the code.

The Planning Commission designated David Butler to be the spokesperson at Town Meeting. Other members who can attend will help. Next, the Planning Commission discussed talking points for the meeting.

- David Grozinsky: We are asking for \$15,000 to preserve the best parts left in this town so that Johnson continues as a living, breathing historic place.
- Cindy: We should be prepared to answer what \$15,000 will add to the grand list.
- David Butler: Form based code is a positive twist on controlling the growth of our community. We are not denying anybody a chance to put a building in here. We are only saying that if you wish to put it in here, it has to conform to what we want to see in Johnson.
- David Grozinsky: You have a set of criteria. These are the aspects we appreciate and want to see carried forward (e.g. setbacks this far, this many stories, etc).
- David Bergh: We should focus on constructing the conversation on how we got here. Citizens in the community came forward and asked us to do something. There is a sense among citizenry that there is very little that the town can do we can do with regard to new development. Form based code seems to be the best response to people's concern. We first pursued a grant but were not funded and that is why we are here today.
- Bob: We are not asking for \$15,000 to implement the code. Our focus is on exploration. The entire approach is to begin with all constituents, get them to meetings, and listen to their vision. They are the ones who will define the form. At the end of the process, we may come to a conclusion that form-based code is not suitable for Johnson.
- Bob: Form based code is a way for us to say to developers: Don't tell us what you we can or cannot do in Johnson, we want to have a voice in the development process.
- David G.: This will not say how the buildings should be used. Rather, the focus will be on the form/shape of the buildings and landscaping.

Town and Village Plan revision process

Lea said that the Village Trustees formally endorsed the process of developing a combined plan for the town and the village. The Selectboard's vote is expected at tonight's meeting. Each Board desires to maintain a voting authority over the plan.

Kim asked whether anything has been done with the Jewett property. Lea said that the property has recently been reappraised. The goal was to get a second opinion and to compare the appraised price to the asking price. Even with the second appraisal, a gap exists between the appraised and the asking price but the gap is significantly smaller.

Branding

Bob Selby cited an example of North Adams, Massachusetts that branded itself as an art town by establishing MASS MoCA art museum. Bob thought that Johnson could achieve the same; all we need is to put a public phase on the art our community already has. There was a discussion about the Vermont Studio Center and how the community would benefit if the VSC had a public gallery space on Main Street.

Cindy thought that the process of branding could be tied in with the process of village/town plan review. What is our town lacking, what do we need, where would we put it? What kind of growth do we want to see? We need infrastructure to support economic development and branding. A couple of needs the Planning Commission mentioned were the lack of commercial space and a desire to turn apartments into store fronts. Bob said that if there was a reason for people to come, there would be an incentive for property owners to make that kind of investment. There is nothing to grab onto but in fact, we are unique in a way that all other towns with beautiful rivers and mountains are not. **Ben Waterman moved and David Bergh seconded the motion to draft, in 2014, a 1-3 paragraph language for the municipal plan addressing branding. This would be a start to a more comprehensive process. All voted in favor. The motion passed.**

Meeting adjourned at 9:00 PM.

Minutes taken by: Lea Kilvadyova

