



NORTHBRIDGE PLANNING BOARD
MINUTES
TUESDAY, JANUARY 24, 2023



On July 16, 2022, Governor Baker signed into Law an Act Relative to Extending Certain State of Emergency Accommodations, including an extension of provisions pertaining to the Open Meeting Law to March 31, 2023. Accordingly, and pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2021, this meeting will be conducted via remote means. Members of the public who wish to access the meeting may do so via ZOOM. No in-person attendance of members of the public will be permitted and public participation in any public hearing conducted during this meeting shall be remote means only.

Recognizing the presence of a quorum Brian Massey, Chair called meeting to order at 7:00 PM, with the following other members in attendance: Michael Baker; James Berkowitz; Abdul Kafal; and Andrew Howden (Associate Member); with R. Gary Bechtholdt II, Town Planner also present. Rainer Forst, Member and Barbara Kinney, Planning Administrative Assistant were absent.

Attendees of the Public: Henry Lane; Bill Renaud; Stephen O'Connell; & Tom (last name not provided).

I. CITIZENS FORUM

None

II. FORM A'S

None

III. PROVIDENCE ROAD TOWN-OWNED LAND (& ADJACENT PRIVATE PROPERTY) -DISCUSSION
Potential Mixed-Use Overlay District -Assessor Map 14 Parcel 17 (& AP 24-12)

Planning Board welcomed Henry Lane, Bill Renaud, and Stephen O'Connell (Turning Point Engineering) representing Owner (BK&R, LLC) of subject property identified as Assessor Map 24 Parcel 21 located off Providence Road (adjacent to the town-owned parcel).

G Bechtholdt informed the Planning Board that the Board of Selectmen, at its meeting of January 09, 2023 voted to sponsor a warrant article for the 2023 Spring Annual Town Meeting to declare the town-owned property (AP 14-17) located on Providence Road as surplus, where if authorized by Town Meeting vote, the Board of Selectmen could then sell the property to a private entity. G Bechtholdt explained as part its consideration the Board of Selectmen reviewed a conceptual development plan proposal for the adjacent property (AP 24-12), consisting of a large-scale residential development with commercial/retail components. Mr. Bechtholdt noted the town-owned parcel, and the adjacent privately owned property are both zoned Industrial, where residential use is currently not permitted.

Mr. Bechtholdt explained that a zoning amendment would be required to allow for proposed use(s) depicted on the conceptual development plan. Mr. Bechtholdt reminded the Planning Board that the adjacent private property has been a topic of discussion previously, where the Board at the time indicated the need to prepare a Housing Production Plan (to identify housing needs: market rate & affordable) as part of any future consideration to rezone property for residential use. G Bechtholdt noted the Board has engaged the

services of Pioneer Valley Planning Commission to prepare the Housing Production Plan, the Planning Board hosted a public forum (November 22, 2022) and is in receipt of an initial draft with additional draft sections to be provided soon. G Bechtholdt explained that he is scheduled to meet with the consultant next week (rescheduled due to winter storm earlier in the month).

G Bechtholdt informed the Planning Board that the concept plan reviewed by the Board of Selectmen (January 09 2023) has since been revised and now shows an increase in the total amount of housing an additional 36-units; from 358 to 394.

Henry Lane, on behalf of BK&R, LLC (Owner) reviewed with the Planning Board conceptual layout plan (#7B) for the adjacent private property prepared by Turning Point Engineering, showing 8 single-family dwelling units; 120 duplex-units; and 266 apartment units (for a total of 394-units), including three (3) separate parcels (carwash, restaurant & other undefined use) and possibly a fourth lot with an undesignated use.

H Lane explained to the Planning Board that he and others have met with the Board of Selectmen 2 to 3 times prior to the January 9th meeting to discuss the adjacent town-owned land, where at its meeting (01/09/2023) the Selectmen voted to declare the land surplus with the idea of disposing and selling it. H Lane proposed it made sense for the Owner (BK&R, LLC) to approach the Town as part of their vetting of development plan ideas for the 70-acre property to see if it was mutually beneficial to incorporate the adjacent town-owned land of 20-acres. H Lane suggested the Board of Selectmen recognized that the town-owned land which was acquired some 115-years ago for the wastewater treatment plan and later bisected and separated out as a result of Route 122 (Providence Road) layout has never been identified by the town for use.

H Lane suggested with the housing shortage declared by the State and the need in Northbridge (a State designated MBTA Community) for more housing may be a win-win, specifically for multi-family housing and rental apartments. H Lane indicted in addition to consideration of a residential development, the property owner and prior owners previously looked at site layouts for the property as industrial, however due to the topography, other land constraints and lack of market for industry, this land-use (industrial) was deemed not very viable or economically feasible. H Lane indicated the development proposal would include a commercial component along Providence Road with the majority of land towards the rear of the property as residential.

H Lane indicated, one of particular interest of the Board of Selectmen was the ability to gain access to the upper ballfields at the High School, where this development proposal would provide an option to access those fields. H Lane explained to do so, would be a fairly expensive undertaking and in order to leverage that sort of access it would take some significant (residential) density to allow all that to happen. H Lane added, the plan layout is only conceptual; we are not sure if it's ever going to happen or be able to be done (vehicular access to ballfields).

H Lane continued, providing an overview of the conceptual layout; where to the south of the property shows multi-family dwellings; primarily rental property, market-rate by in large, however can talk about other options. To the northerly side, H Lane explained the concept is still sort of in flux, shows perhaps less density; duplex type units, potentially 55 and over, but not necessarily age-restricted; these are the kind of concepts we are looking at.

H Lane asked the Planning Board to authorize the Town Planner to work with the Property Owner to come up with an overlay district bylaw (zoning provision) to allow for this kind of development that we have conceptually prepared. H Lane suggested new provision may assist the town in satisfying the MBTA Community requirements for multi-family housing; if the town wants to qualify for ongoing state grants will need to provide for greater density zoning, where in his point of view this site seems to be ideal. The property has, in general proximity available water and sewer infrastructure and within a location that has very good traffic access; along a State Highway (Rt 122/Providence Road) that can accommodate the development density being proposed.

H Lane reiterated that he would like for the Planning Board, after some general discussion, take the position to have the Town Planner work with him and others on developing an overlay district provision that would accomplish the mixed-use development prepared in time for 2023 Spring Annual Town Meeting, noting approximately only 5 to 6-weeks before the warrant closes (March 03, 2023), suggesting it may take some work but could get done.

Stephen O'Connell, Turning Point Engineering offered additional insight on the conceptual layout and density proposed, showing two (2) means of access/egress; one from the BK&R, LLC property and the another utilizing town-own land from Providence Road (RT 122). S O'Connell reviewed with the Planning Board conceptual layout plan for the adjacent private property, showing 8 single-family dwelling units; 120 duplex-units; and 266 apartment units (for a total of 394-units), including three (3) separate parcels (carwash, restaurant & other undefined use) and possibly a fourth lot with an undesignated use. S O'Connell indicated water and sewer would also be brought up to the upper ballfields site and parking area.

B Massey thanked Attorney Lane and S O'Connell for their presentation and sought input from Planning Board members: J Berkowitz indicated his support of the development concept; inquired about open space areas, the potential non-residential uses and suggested more parking for the upper ballfields. A Howden asked about the various housing types (totally 394-units), indicated he would be in favor of a development proposal if it included an age-restriction; expressed concerns with a potential \$9mil tax burden on town based on roughly 1.5 school-aged children per unit, suggesting if development was over 55, tax burden would be less from a financial perspective.

S O'Connell stated they have not taken the position that this development would have an impact on schools, in fact feel project would have minimal impact on schools. S O'Connell indicated they would be in favor if the bylaw included an age-restriction for the single and duplex-units. S O'Connell suggested the goal for the proposed apartments would also be to not introduce students or have a minimal impact on the schools, where the units as designed would be one and two-bedrooms. The only requirement to have 3-bedroom would be a regulatory requirement if there is a need from a housing demand standpoint for families who need rental apartments that would be something we would work on with Planning and the Planning Board on the number of units in the apartment buildings that would be 3-bedrooms, otherwise they would be one and 2-bedroom units.

B Massey questioned the likelihood of constructing an access road to the High School ballfields given the steep grades and limited area to put parking as depicted on the concept plan. B Massey stated the project keeps changing, citing the most recent plan shows a much greater residential count and density, where prior layouts had more commercial. B Massey agreed with A Howden on concerns with additional school-aged

children and asked if they have contacted the School Committee about what impacts a project such as this could have on the schools.

B Massey cautioned and reminded those of other instances when the town rezoned property in the 1970's to residential (Theresa Circle area), where the town no longer has industrial land available along Route 146 for economic development.

B Massey reminded those, that the Planning Board is currently paying a consultant to prepare a Housing Production Plan for the town, a report this Board initiated as a result of previous discussions had concerning this property; the plan is nearing completion, however, will not be done until after Town Meeting. B Massey is not in favor of having the Town Planner or the Board spend time on drafting a bylaw until after the Housing Production Plan is completed. B Massey expressed concerns with the Planning Board being asked to support something for a Town Meeting when the Board does not have sufficient time to review in order to make an educated decision.

S O'Connell indicated it was not their intent to burden the Planning Board; if timing is not favorable, they are willing to consider a different timeline, noting they want to work together. Attorney Lane suggested if May Town Meeting is not realistic, we can at least start the conversations. B Massey agreed to start those conversation, but not under the circumstances where the Board would need to make a decision based solely on the timing of an upcoming Town Meeting. B Massey indicated he was supportive of the concept, provided it includes age-restrictions and does not negatively impact the schools or town services, especially the rentals. B Massey reiterated the need for them to go before and get input from the School Committee. B Massey stated he would look to have a bylaw requiring the non-residential buildout to be completed before any residential. B Massey stated willing to work with property owners and others over the next several months as the Housing Production Plan is completed.

G Bechtholdt suggested an initial draft template of an overlay zoning may be provided to Planning for review, noting we have not seen any provisions that would allow for the conceptual mixed-use layout. If H Lane, S O'Connell, or B Renaud want to provide me with a draft or reference an existing bylaw from another community that may be a good starting point. As the Planning Board concludes with the Housing Production Plan, the draft can be updated based upon housing needs that may be identified in the housing plan, as well as amended to address other town needs. G Bechtholdt agreed with B Massey and A Howden of the need to involve or seek input from the School Committee, reminding those the subject property is currently zoned Industrial, where the town's zoning is largely already residential, approximately 85% of developable land lies within the Residential Zoning District.

B Renaud asked about the status of the Housing Production Plan. G Bechtholdt explained he has an initial draft of certain sections, including general overview of plan and town census/demographic info. G Bechtholdt is to meet with the consultant later next week, after which a follow-up public forum with the Planning Board will be held to seek input from the public on the town's affordable housing needs and identify means to address those needs. G Bechtholdt mentioned once the plan is formalized a public meeting of the Board of Selectmen (TBD) will be arranged for additional public comment and vote to approve the Housing Production Plan before submitting it the State (DHCD -Department of Housing & Community Development) for certification/approval.

B Massey thanked attendee, noting the Board will take discussion under advisement and shall look to continue discussion once the Housing Production Plan is completed; suggesting in the meantime, if they want to provide an initial draft to G Bechtholdt, Planning can start his review of potential bylaw.

OLD/NEW BUSINESS

Approval of Meeting Minutes -December 13, 2022 & January 10, 2023

Planning Board tabled action on acceptance of meeting minutes.

2022 Planning Board Annual Report

Planning Board reviewed draft report prepared by Planning; Community Planning & Development to submit on behalf of the Planning Board.

2023 Open Space & Recreation Plan -Status & Next Steps

G Bechtholdt informed the Board that the draft plan should be ready for review February/March 2023.

2023 Housing Production Plan -Status & Next Steps

Planning Board acknowledged receipt of draft sections of the Plan prepared by Pioneer Valley Planning Commission. G Bechtholdt is to review with consultant (Pioneer Valley Planning Commission) draft and remaining components; arrangements to be made with Planning Board on finalizing plan and local adoption.

1994 Master Plan (update) -MGL Chapter 41 Section 81D

G Bechtholdt reminded the Planning Board, thanks to the support and recognition of the importance of having a Master Plan, the Town Manager has allowed for the budgeting of necessary funds for this initiative; G Bechtholdt suggested with the anticipated completion of the Open Space & Recreation Plan and Housing Production Plan (both elements of a master plan), the Planning Board should begin to look to establish an Ad-hoc Committee to assist in preparing a comprehensive plan (estimated 12 to 18-month process).

2023 Spring Annual Town Meeting (May 02, 2023)

Point of information -no discussion.

2023 SATM Warrant Closes (March 03, 2023)

Point of information -no discussion.

Planning Board -Vote to Sponsor Warrant Article(s)

G Bechtholdt advised the Planning Board if they have any zoning amendment articles for Town Meeting consideration, they will need to submit prior to the March 03, 2023 timeline. G Bechtholdt reminded Board members, for all zoning amendments (whether sponsored by the Board or submitted via petition), the Planning Board is required to hold a public hearing and offer recommendation prior to Town Meeting.

Mumford Riverwalk Boardwalk (Linwood Ave) -Status/Update

G Bechtholdt explained that professional consulting services will be engaged for OPM -Owners Project Manager) to assist the town in preparing bid documents and help oversee construction of the planned elevated boardwalk along the Mumford Riverwalk; the Conservation Commission has issued an Order of

Conditions for the project; it is anticipated construction (design/build) will be performed this Summer/Fall 2023.

Rockdale Pocket Park (Providence Rd) -Status/Update

G Bechtholdt explained, Landscape Architect is to update the park layout based upon input and comments received from Safety Committee and others; filing with Conservation Commission is required due to proximity of Blackstone River, with a Notice of Intent to be filed for review and approval; it is anticipated construction will commence Summer/Fall 2023.

Site Plan/Subdivision Developments -Status/Update

None offered at this time.

Planning Board Concerns

None offered at this time.

Mail -Review

In addition to the mail listed, the Planning Board noted receipt of the following communications: Planning Board Agenda (January 24, 2023); Draft Planning Board Agenda (February 14, 2023); Conceptual Layout Plan for Providence Road, including aerial-view of property; Draft Planning Board minutes (December 13, 2022); copy of Planning Board 2022 Annual Report; series of documents entitled "Housing Toolbox for Massachusetts Communities"; (draft) Housing Production Plan; Community Planning & Development Weekly Report January 09-13, 2023; Town of Douglas Public Hearing Notice; and the 2023 Planning Board meeting calendar.

Other

None

ADJOURNMENT

Having no additional business, the Planning Board adjourned its meeting of January 24, 2023 at or about 8:35 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Approved by the Planning Board: 03/14/2023

R. Gary Bechtholdt II
Town Planner

Cc: Town Clerk /File