

MINUTES
JOINT SPECIAL MEETING
ZONING AND PLANNING COMMISSIONS
MAY 7, 2008 - 6:00 P.M.
TOWN HALL ANNEX – COMMUNITY ROOM 1

I. ROLL CALL

Zoning Commission:	Cady, French, Haviland, Hudecek, Marquardt, O'Neill, Sutherland
Planning Commission:	Kane, Steinfeld, Pritchard, Fitzgerald, Munn
Excused:	
Staff:	Cullen, Davis, Murphy, Strother, Quinn, Treadway, Moulding
Other:	Mac Birch, Lane Kendig

II. ITEMS OF BUSINESS

1. Consultant Presentation and Public Communications

Michael Murphy, Director of Planning and Development thanked the audience for attending. He noted his role in directing the Town's planning program and that this effort has come out of several years of policy development. Mr. Murphy explained the process the staff and Commissions used in choosing Kendig Keast Collaborative and turned the meeting over to Mac Birch from the consultant team.

Mac Birch, Project Manager with Kendig Keast stated that they are a national planning firm which has been in existence for over 20 years. There have 11 employees in the firm, 5 of which will be working on this project. They are here to familiarize themselves with our community, and the various regulations. They met earlier today with large property owners, professionals, and staff and will meet with commercial development, environmental, and social agencies tomorrow. The next stage will be reviewing the current regulations and familiarizing themselves with policies in the various Town documents. In a couple of months they will present the strengths and weaknesses of our current regulations and then the real work of changing the current documents will begin. They will be looking at appropriate densities, preserving open space, slopes, and what types of things make this place special. The standards and procedures will be reviewed and updated. The Commissions will be looking at various segments to change and adopt and then public hearings will be held. Some of the changes will be legislative and others procedural. Their firm looks at design features and best practices and turns them into code language.

Lane Kendig stated his initial observations are that there is clearly a need to revise the regulations. There appears to be a lot of controversy, over whether there is over regulation or regulation with any meaning. He stated that density or size and use are used extensively in zoning. Mr. Kendig reviewed types of design such as cluster, non-residential, urban, auto urban, suburban, and estate. Mr. Kendig discussed the protection of natural resources and how to work with developers to address design densities and increase open space protection. He stated that a site capacity calculation identifies resources and sets a protection for them. Cluster plans are almost 100% efficiency. He realizes that open space is very valuable to the community. He asked for comments from the public regarding concerns and suggestions about the regulations.

Joan Smith voiced concerns with clustering, allowing more homes to be built where they shouldn't be and how density would be figured. She would also like to see alternative means of transportation and traffic reduction looked at.

Jim Furlong is concerned with acquiring and protecting open space. He stated that Groton has a special designation with the state to receive 65% grants to purchase open space.

Zell Steever would like the consultants to look at the capacity of resources, source water protection and reservoir protection.

Paulanne Sheets, Town Councilor is working on establishing a task force on climate change and would like these types of concerns integrated with the amendments.

Mac Birch stated that the challenge of bringing LEEDS standards into Zoning is that a building does not get its rating until after it's built. Lane Kendig stated their philosophy is putting in hard standards.

Priscilla Pratt would like to see the regulations changed so large box developments can't be put in Water protection districts.

Mariellen French would like to see the most up to date Best practices incorporated into the regulations.

Genevieve Cerf would like to keep the rural character of the Town by balancing development with open space preservation.

Mac Birch stated that standards for bicycle parking will be looked at. They are presently looking for plans and techniques to implement the various plans the Town has now. He did encourage revising the POCD and other Town documents in the future as needed.

Murphy stated that the consultants are assisting the Commissions in upgrading the regulations based on the specific recommendations in the Plan of Conservation and Development. Mac Birch stated that this doesn't mean they are going to ignore things that are not in the POCD.

Paulann Sheets stated that one of the frustrations for the natural resource community is that the Town is without a buildable land definition.

Mr. Murphy thanked everyone for coming and stated that part of this process is to address buildable land and density standards, as well as other recommendations in the POCD comprehensively. Matt Davis will be the point of contact for this project. The consultants will issue recommendations at the next stage. Mr. Murphy encouraged the public to come to the Planning Office to get updates on projects such as the Thomas Road bikeway, to make sure they have accurate information.

III. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:55 p.m.