

TOWN OF STOW
PLANNING BOARD

Minutes of the February 27, 2024, Planning Board Meeting

Planning Board members present: Lori Clark, Nancy Arsenault, John Colonna-Romano, Margaret Costello

Absent: Karen Kelleher, Deb Woods (Voting Associate)

Lori Clark called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

Town Center Transportation Improvements

Present: Dennis Flynn, Jeff Maxtutis, Anna Sangree- BETA Group, Inc.

Valerie Oorthuys provided background information for the planning process, stating that updating Town Center has long been a priority for the Town to upgrade the streets in town center so that they more safely and conveniently accommodate all users. The goal is for the roads to better meet the needs of our residents and businesses. In 2021 TM set aside funds for concept planning, which is how the Town was able to contract with BETA Group. This work builds off an intersection study completed last fall by the Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization, which gathered baseline data and made preliminary recs. BETA Group will present existing conditions, a review of initial concept plans for discussion.

Dennis Flynn provided a review of the study area and described relevant recommendations from the Complete Streets Prioritization Plan. Dennis Flynn reviewed the jurisdiction of the roadways, existing pedestrian infrastructure, parking areas, crashes, and vehicle volumes and turn counts. The presentation included a review of existing assets and strengths, such as the amount of municipally owned property in Town Center and connections to open space such as the Town Center Park. Barriers to walking and biking were discussed, as well as the types of tools engineers and planners can use to slow traffic, provide bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, and ease accessibility for all users.

Dennis Flynn provided a handful of preliminary concepts to help drive the discussion. These included a shared use path over the Common and in front of Town Building, realigning the intersection of Crescent Street and Great Road, bicycle and pedestrian connections along the eastern portion of Great Road, and numerous updates to the Great Road/ Gleasondale Road intersection.

During the public discussion, the following questions, concerns, and suggestions were raised:

- Need for clarification of which Town body is responsible for determining whether sidewalks will be plowed in the future;
- Confusion regarding the existing sign at the eastern intersection of Crescent Street turning onto Great Road;
- Interest in providing a lead left on Library Hill Road headed east onto Great Road for cyclists;
- A note that students leave Center School to head to Russell's and Randall Library outside of the afternoon peak hours;
- Concern that sidewalks may not be used;
- Concern for the use of ebikes on shared use paths;
- A note that the former Fire Station will provide parking for Randall Library, necessitating sidewalks and crosswalks to help pedestrians safely navigate the Hartley Road/ Crescent Street/ Library Hill Road intersection;

- A request for the inclusion of bike boxes at the intersection of Great Road and Route 62, particularly for cyclists headed north on Gleasondale Road toward Library Hill Road;
- A note that there is a line of mailboxes for the homes at Center Place along Great Road, and access to these should be preserved during and after any future construction;
- A request for a sidewalk between St. Isidore's and Center School;
- A comment that a simple, inexpensive method of slowing traffic is to narrow lanes upon the Town Center approach;
- A reminder to continue to coordinate with the Randall Library project to ensure alignment with future plans for Common Road, including the possibility of including a raised crosswalk to slow cut-through traffic;
- A request for an alternative to the concept proposed for a shared use path along the Common, possibly a similar path along Common Road;
- Interest in determining the number of houses and businesses within a ten minute walk of these improvements;
- Concern for the ability to snow plow Great Road if the cantilevered path idea is constructed.

Joanne Drive Subdivision: Street Acceptance Process, Bond Reduction, and As-Built Plans

Present: Chuck Black, Kendall Homes

The Planning Board reviewed correspondence related to the request for a bond reduction for Phases I and II of the Joanne Drive Subdivision, including a letter from the Applicant's engineer on remaining improvements and correspondence from the Board's consulting engineer. Staff acknowledged the intent to have Joanne Drive accepted at Town Meeting in May 2024.

Meg Costello motioned to approve the reduction of the combined Phase I and Phase II Escrow Amount by \$144,337.59 for improvements completed and confirmed by Places Associates, Inc. from a previous amount of \$165,903.00 to an Escrow Amount of \$21,565.41, and authorized Karen Kelleher to sign on the Board's behalf.

John Colonna-Romano seconded.

Vote: Lori Clark - **Yea**; Nancy Arsenault - **Yea**; John Colonna-Romano - **Yea**, Margaret Costello – **Yea**

Review of Minutes

Meg Costello motioned to approve the minutes of January 16, 2024 as amended.

John Colonna-Romano seconded.

Vote: Lori Clark - **Yea**; Nancy Arsenault - **Yea**; John Colonna-Romano - **Yea**, Margaret Costello – **Yea**

Margaret Costello motioned to approve the minutes of January 23, 2024 as amended.

John Colonna-Romano seconded.

Vote: Lori Clark - **Yea**; Nancy Arsenault - **Yea**; John Colonna-Romano - **Yea**, Margaret Costello – **Yea**

Margaret Costello motioned to approve the Executive Session minutes of January 23, 2024 as amended.

John Colonna-Romano seconded.

Vote: Lori Clark - **Yea**; Nancy Arsenault - **Yea**; John Colonna-Romano - **Yea**, Margaret Costello – **Yea**

Correspondence

Members discussed recent news regarding the Town of Milton's noncompliance with Section 3A MBTA Communities legislation. Members discussed consequences of noncompliance and various timelines for compliance.

Planning Board Member Updates

Nancy Arsenault noted that a number of business plazas in the region are seeing redevelopment to include mixed uses.

Margaret Costello said that she is doing some exploratory research to understand the process and costs associated with converting overhead utilities to underground so that new businesses can work with Hudson Light and Power to receive electric utilities on private property via underground conduit. Margaret Costello said that a goal of this research is to better communicate with Lower Village property owners the way to convert utilities and arm the Board with information to be able to refute claims of economic infeasibility. Margaret Costello noted that placing utilities underground has long been a priority of the Board's, however business property owners have historically been reticent to proceed with this.

Planning Director's Report

Lower Village Developments – Staff are meeting with the owner of 124 Great Road to hold a pre-filing meeting regarding their plans for a car detail shop and the new bylaw. In other news, the Board's consulting engineer at Places Associates, Inc. is reviewing the most recent Stow House of Pizza site plan. This item will be placed on an upcoming agenda once a letter has been received from Places. The temporary common victualler license through the Select Board expires at the end of March and will be on the Select Board's March 26th agenda for consideration of renewal.

Housing Production Plan and MBTA Communities/ 3A Work – The next Housing Production Plan (HPP) forum has been scheduled for March 27th, at which point draft housing goals and strategies will be shared. The update to the HPP has been a helpful process in gaining feedback from residents about where in Stow housing development should occur and could inform the MBTA Communities zoning process. The feedback so far in the HPP process has been very positive, with residents asking for more diversity in housing, for multifamily allowances, and for housing to be located in areas of Stow that are already well-served by amenities such as sidewalks, businesses, and municipal buildings. In the meantime, staff continue their involvement in regional discussions with planners in other communities termed "adjacent small towns". Staff intend to reinvigorate public MBTA Communities discussions after the HPP is finalized.

Comprehensive Plan – March 1 kicks off an 8 week period of public engagement around the plan, and tools for residents to provide input include a survey, an online mapping tool, and a 'meeting in a box'.

Public Input

None.

Town Center Streetscape Improvement Project

The Planning Board reviewed the draft technical memo and debriefed the earlier presentation from consultants at BETA Group.

Margaret Costello pointed out two errors in the draft memo, correcting the portion of Great Road that is also Route 62 and a mistaken reference to dog walking allowed at Town Center Park.

Nancy Arsenault noted that consideration should be given to snow plowing to ensure ease of plowing and to consider whether the Town would want bike lanes and sidewalks plowed.

Members noted that access to Town Center Park should be clarified. Nancy Arsenault said she feels the path from First Parish Church to Town Center Park should remain a private connection and not implicated in these plans.

Members expressed their interest in the consultant's initially brainstormed ideas, noting that it is a benefit to not limit the Town's vision this early on in the concept planning process. Lori Clark noted that previous plans, such as the Pedestrian Walkway Subcommittee, gained feedback around expanding pedestrian facilities indicated that residents want the ability to safely walk long distances for recreation or access to services.

John Colonna-Romano noted it would be helpful to understand the number of homes and businesses within the study area as well as within a 20 minute walk to better explain the potential impact of the project.

The Board discussed options for discouraging cut-through traffic on Common Road, such as speed bumps or a raised crosswalk.

The Board discussed placing an item on a future agenda to discuss how to get input from various stakeholders.

Adjournment

Margaret Costello motioned to adjourn.

John Colonna -Romano seconded.

Vote: Lori Clark - **Yea**; Nancy Arsenault - **Yea**; John Colonna-Romano – **Yea**; Margaret Costello -**Yea**.

Respectfully Submitted,
Valerie Oorthuys