



TOWN OF EASTON
Planning & Zoning Board
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Subcommittee Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, February 15, 2011

Present: Christine Santoro, Chair; Walter Johnson, Clerk; Peter Deschenes; Gregory Strange; Dan Smith; Wayne Benson, Jr.; Brad Washburn, Planning Director

Christine Santoro called the subcommittee meeting to order at 7:20 p.m.

ZONING BYLAW DISCUSSION

The Planning Board is reviewing the town's Zoning Bylaws and considering changes and additions. The ban on internally illuminated signs needs to be addressed in commercial areas, particularly at the three shopping plazas in Easton where most businesses already have internally illuminated signs. Building height is being reviewed in order to maintain the scale and character of Easton's older neighborhoods. And the board is considering adding a section to the bylaw on solar energy. There are typos in the existing bylaws which need to be corrected. There are also some proposed minor changes to the zoning map.

Solar Energy

The Town of Easton has a landfill that is closed on Prospect Street. There is currently an opportunity to install a solar field at the Prospect Street landfill. In order to develop the solar field at the landfill site, the town would need to change the zoning to allow for a solar field. There are several options for this type of zoning: create an overlay district (recommended approach), as-of-right everywhere, or as-of-right in certain districts, with or without a site plan review. Considerations would include minimum parcel size and limiting the size of the solar installation. Dan Smith explained how solar energy works from the sun to the grid and the benefits of a solar field to the Town. Adding a solar field at the landfill site would make it a revenue-generating operation for the Town; and with the Town facing a budget deficit, the timing is optimal for a new source of revenue. Revenue from the solar field would be generated through permitting fees for construction, leasing the land to a private developer, and real estate taxes. In addition, the Town would have the opportunity to purchase electricity at a lower rate than the current market price, and cost savings would increase as utility rates increase. Mr. Smith used the Brockton Brightfields solar field as an example. The Brockton Brightfields project was funded by federal dollars as a test site for the state. The Prospect Street landfill could generate two megawatts of power and approximately \$200,000 per year in revenue. In order to get the best use of available tax credits, the goal would be to have the project up and running in 12 to 18 months. The Town of Easton municipal offices consume approximately 6.5 megawatts of electricity per year. In this scenario, the Town would generate power at the solar field and buy it back from the developer at a reduced rate. The developer leases the land and carries liability insurance for disruption in service. The Town maintains the easement at the site.

Federal government financial incentives make it a worthwhile investment for the developer, as this is currently a subsidized industry. There would be significant cost savings on electricity. The developer handles all operations associated with the site. Site monitoring would be done by a third party. The chair solicited further questions and there were none.

Residential Building Height

Proposed changes to the bylaw address the need to protect the scale of residential buildings in Easton's older neighborhoods. Gregory Strange drafted proposed changes regarding residential building height and setbacks and presented these changes to the board as a work-in-progress (see file for table of changes). Mr. Strange suggested removing language from the existing bylaw regarding average distance for setbacks and instead including wording to establish pre-existing grade with regard to maximum height. Currently a developer can raise the existing grade several feet and then build to the maximum height of 35 feet. Mr. Strange suggested modeling changes on Westwood's bylaw. An intention of dynamic zoning is allow for increase in height further from the setbacks. Mr. Strange reviewed considerations with regard to existing grade, walk out basements, and non-conforming structures. The board considered a multi-district approach to the various residential areas. The chair solicited comments from the public; there were none. There was a small discussion around the effect of larger scale building on neighboring property values. The goal is to maintain housing values and mitigate the street's visual impact of new or rebuilt homes. Resident and Historical Commission Chair Melanie Deware echoed the board's interest in keeping new and rebuilt homes in scale with their neighborhoods.

Signs

The fall 2009 Town Meeting voted to modify the Zoning Bylaw by prohibiting internally illuminated signs. All new sign permit applications must comply with the ban, even businesses located in shopping centers where 90% of the existing businesses are using internally illuminated signs. The Planning Department has heard from businesses and owners of the three shopping plazas in Easton. Brad Washburn gave a presentation on the various types of internally and externally illuminated signage, including cabinet, neon, halo, channel letters, and goose neck lighting. The board discussed options for amending the bylaw through overlays, design guidelines, and other ideas. The board favors design guidelines and agrees that they should not be rushed in developing them. An interim idea is to keep the sign bylaw as it is and add a statement giving the Planning Board the right to waive the ban; it would be up to the board's discretion to ensure the sign works for the business and is consistent with surrounding signage. The larger goal would still be an overlay(s) on the zoning map and detailed design guidelines. The idea is to work toward a comprehensive sign bylaw that takes the needs of the various business districts into consideration. Mr. Enrico, who represents the owners of Roche Brothers Plaza, agreed with allowing room for internally illuminated signs in the bylaw. Until the bylaw is amended at Town Meeting, a new businesses' only option is to go before the Zoning Board of Appeals. The Planning Board will include the Historical Commission on the requests for comment on new sign applications.

Accessory Dwelling Units

Currently, homeowners wishing to add an in-law apartment to their single family home must apply through the Zoning Board of Appeals for a two-family residence. The only oversight the Planning Board has in these matters is through the Zoning Board of Appeals' request for

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comment on the applications. The Planning Board has seen an increase in these types of applications and wishes to address the need for in-law's quarters through the Zoning Bylaw. There are two options: through special permit or as-of-right. The board agreed the as-of-right approach works better. The bylaw will state its intentions in the opening language. The proposed bylaw would address the following: to ensure the apartments are owner occupied; to maintain the appearance of a single-family home; and to limit the size of the in-law suite. It was suggested to have two separate sections of the bylaw: one for those looking to build an in-law apartment within the existing home, and one for in-law additions. Brad Washburn will draft language for the bylaw and draft warrant articles after the next subcommittee meeting.

Please note, the Planning Board meetings scheduled for March 7th and April 25th will be held at Oliver Ames High School in the Simmons Lecture Hall.

ADJOURN SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING

Walter Johnson motioned to adjourn the subcommittee meeting at 9:07pm. Peter Deschenes seconded. Motion passes 5-0-0.

Meeting minutes respectfully submitted by Randi L. Graham, Recording Secretary.