

East Haddam Village Revitalization Committee
Meeting
Thursday, September 23, 2010
Minutes

DRAFT

Committee Members Present: Bill Gerrish, Melanie Kolek, Will Brady, Mary Ellen Klinck (arrived 7:17), Lisa McNellis, Michael Gionta. Others in attendance: George Fellner, Bob Scherrer, Paul Maxwell, Mark Walter, David Nelson, Jef Wolter, Bob Casner

Mr. Gerrish called the meeting to order at 7:07 p.m.

Approval of minutes:

Minutes from the meeting of August 26, 2010: Amendments proposed by Mr. Brady to change “William” to “Will”; Ms. McNellis proposed adding that Mr. Felner lived in the Village for 13 years. Motion made by Ms. Kolek to accept minutes with amendments, seconded by Mr. Gerrish. Motion carried. Mr. Gionta abstained.

Minutes from the special meeting of August 31, 2010: Amendment proposed by Ms. Kolek to change “Russel” to “Russell”. Motion made by Ms. McNellis to accept minutes with amendments, seconded by Mr. Gerrish. Motion carried. Mr. Gionta abstained.

Old Business

None.

New Business

Mr. Fellner provided additional information regarding sustainable design strategies within the proposed Village project renderings. He also provided description of changes made in the renderings, including placement of islands in the middle of the site to accommodate for emergency personnel vehicles, among other things. Mr. Fellner also detailed several alternative plans for entrance into the site presuming DOT’s approval but also for phasing options and consideration should the Village incorporate the present Coldwell Banker and/or Stonecroft properties.

Mr. Walter stated that he has spoken with DOT to get started on the process of their approval to inquire if the Coldwell and/or Stonecroft properties should be incorporated. There was also discussion that the plan without those properties incorporates enough critical mass (40-42k square feet) but the addition of these two properties would be vital for at least ingress and egress.

Mr. Fellner then presented “textured” realistic views of the property, showing present photos he took of the property, then those pictures incorporated into the views from the proposed Village site. Mr. Fellner also noted that if the electrical wires presently extending in front of the vista overlooking the Goodspeed could be hidden underground, that would be preferred because it takes away from the view. Mr. Feller provided floor plans for each of the proposed buildings, which he said would be important to provide to any interested developer.

Ms. Kolek questioned if Mr. Fellner would be interested in working with a developer in the future should the town fund the same, which he said he would be interested in dependent on the funding provided and the tasks requested.

Mr. Brady raised several questions and concerns of the HDC. The first was a concern by a few members of the HDC of attracting patrons into the other areas of the Village outside of the proposed plan. There was also noted concern about 2nd story handicap access in the proposed buildings. There was also discussion about the porches on the front of the two front buildings, which Mr. Fellner stated that based on prior discussions after the initial renderings, he added to comport with the aesthetics of the Goodspeed.

Mr. Brady also raised concern about the views of the plan and how those will translate if developed. Mr. Brady stated that the renderings of the new actor housing did not accurately portray the closeness to the roadway. Mr. Fellner stated that his plans are as accurate as they can be, such that if someone was doing a flyover, once built, those plans would match the renderings perfectly, including the space between the roadway and the walkway. Mr. Fellner stated that he added the textured design so that the committee could see true-to-life dimensions of the project, noting that the two story buildings, including the roof, are approximately 25-30 feet tall.

Mr. Fellner reiterated that the spacing in between the buildings was of utmost priority, noting that although a critical mass threshold is necessary, this does not mean plugging insensitive buildings into the plan. His goal was to give the project character but also allow the buildings to be within reasonable proximity to each other. Mr. Gionta stated that it appeared that Mr. Fellner's allowances between buildings matched the outskirts of the project.

Mr. Brady stated that there was a prior project where there was a two tier building for employees in the project. Mr. Gionta stated that the design was part of the Goodspeed grant for \$3 million which is now not funded. Mr. Fellner stated that he reviewed all the prior studies of the town in drafting the renderings and noted that a more recent 2006 study was done (referring to the Harrell study) that was more current and in-line with present desires for the Village area.

Ms. Klinck stated that she felt the parking spaces were good (76 in all) and the plan was practical considering the committee has to market it to a developer. She believes that the buildings and accompanying parking create "a good balance."

Mr. Brady also mentioned that there was discussion in the HDC about cutting back the burm in front of the present Town Hall, which would thereby eliminate the two front buildings, which Mr. Fellner did not recommend. Mr. Feller also noted that with respect to patrons leaving the Village and not venturing into the Village proper, he would find that was a compliment to the committee for coming up with a vision plan that matches the want of the patrons/citizens. He noted, though, as he did in prior meetings, that he created cross roads and pedestrian pathways to accommodate for pedestrian traffic.

Audience of Citizens

Mr. Maxwell questioned Mr. Feller regarding whether he reviewed the parking regulations, which Mr. Fellner stated that he did.

Mr. Wolter stated that as a citizen of the town and as a professional with 25 years of doing large scale development(Pfizer, BlueBack Square, Colt Building), there are several things he would recommend to the committee as it proceeds forward. First, he noted that there is no southbound access off of Route 82 based on the primary design, which DOT will take issue with. He believes that it is critical for the committee to have the property at the Coldwell and Stonecroft buildings. He also recommended that the town consider cost-saving options, i.e. tearing down the garage itself versus paying the contractor to do it. He said that the committee should think of what the town would think of the developer coming in, that the committee “has to do it right.” He said that this incorporates entering into the appropriate agreement with the general contractor (comprehensive development or piecemeal) that while allowing the developer control to follow through with the project, allows the town to also retain some control. The committee also needs to consider the agreement in terms of if the contractor goes bankrupt mid-stream. For drafting the RFP, Mr. Wolter offered to bring in a few colleagues to discuss our next steps, which the committee agreed would be appropriate and welcomed.

Mr. Scherrer noted that the project shown by Mr. Feller was in color whereas the rest of the Village was not filled in. He said by thinking of the whole Village downtown globally, this may be easier for folks to conceptualize. With respect to entrance/exit and the approved plans, that the committee should take one vision and propose it to the town, making note of the reasons why the plan is preferred.

General Discussion

Mr. Gerrish asked the committee if we needed a motion to accept the plans of Mr. Fellner. Ms. Kolek stated that she did not think this was necessary because we had accepted his plans at the last meeting. To the extent that these were preliminary and various alternatives were also proposed, Ms. Kolek was of the opinion that the committee should move forward on the next steps.

Ms. McNellis stated that she was not aware the DOT would not approve a plan without a southbound entrance.

Ms. Klinck stated this project is not happening now. She said she was optimistic to consider only one access into the project, but that the committee should present it to a developer. If/when a developer expressed interest and is chosen by the committee, then the committee can go to the town with a unified vision. Mr. Fellner offered to make 11x17 boards for presentations to a developer.

Mr. Walter stated that he will schedule another meeting with the DOT. Mr. Ginota said that it will be helpful to have DOT sit with the potential developers to discuss possible options.

Mr. Brady stated that the area is a Historic District and Village District area and recommended that the committee reach out to the HDC and other town committees for approval. Ms. Kolek thought this was a premature, inasmuch as the committee does not know if a developer will be interested in developing the area or if the DOT would approve the roadway necessary for such a project. Ms. Kolek also noted that it is not the intention of the committee, created two years ago, to exclude any discussion with the committees in town but unless and until the committee knows that there is an interested developer that would consider developing the property, it would be

premature to market the plan to town committees as the plans crafted by Mr. Fellner will likely change to a varying degree. Ms. Klinck stated that a developer is going to have many discussions and recommendations.

Mr. Gerrish recommended that that committee reconvene at the next regularly scheduled meeting on October 28th where Mr. Wolter's contacts and possible representatives from DOT can join discussion regarding future steps of the committee.

Motion to adjourn made by Ms. Kolek, seconded by Ms. McNellis. Meeting adjourned at 8:19 pm.