

**Ashland Planning Board
Draft Minutes
May 25, 2016**

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 6:30 PM by Chairman Susan MacLeod.

Members Present: Members present for the meeting were Susan MacLeod, Cheryl Cox, Mardean Badger, Fran Newton, Carol Fucarile and Normand DeWolfe.

Others Present Others present for the meeting were John Velpey, Alan Lane and Alex Ray.

DISPOSITION OF MINUTES

The minutes were tabled for this meeting and will be reviewed by the board at their next regularly scheduled meeting.

OLD BUSINESS

The Planning Board at their June 1, 2016 meeting will be holding a Public Hearing for the Electric Department Application, a Boundary Line Adjustment regarding the Smith Property and Whitten Woods, and the Peters Site Plan Waiver at 79 Main Street.

The Planning Board discussed the Peters Site Plan Waiver. The Board is aware that the Peters property at 79 Main Street has recently opened as Granite State Hedgehogs prior to their approval for a Site Plan Waiver. Fran Newton made the following motion concerning the Site Plan Waiver: To approve the Waiver for Site Plan Review for Granite State Hedgehogs. Be it noted that Granite State Hedgehogs opened before receiving a Waiver for Site Plan Review. Mardean Badger seconded the motion. With all votes in the affirmative the motion passed.

The Planning Board met with John Velpey, Alan Lane and Alex Ray asking them for their input, ideas and suggestions with regards to Design Standards for the town of Ashland going forward. The Board has researched Design Standards for Windham and Milford to see how they and other towns in the state dealt with design standards in their communities.

Main Street Ashland is in two Commercial Zones with Adams Body Shop as the boundary between the two zones. The representatives of the business owners expressed the following concerns and observations:

- The lower village of Ashland (Main Street from Scribner's Library down past the present Fire Station) is neglected. There is no foot traffic in this part of town and vehicular traffic follows Rte 3 out of town via River Street on their way to Holderness. The business owners would like to see signage advertising the businesses in the lower village. The signage would be placed at the triangle near Cumberland Farms. DOT has jurisdiction concerning signage that goes in the triangle and is discouraging businesses from putting signage in that area.

- A Zoning Ordinance was passed in March 2016 stipulating that all storefronts on Main Street must remain storefronts on their first floors. Apartments may be established in these storefront buildings on the second floor and above.
- The boundaries of the Commercial Zone are from Meredith Village Savings Bank to West Street and on to I-93 then down to the Fire Station on Route 132. This area has been designated for retail stores and shops as well as banking and retail office space. Private residences now in existence within the Commercial Zone going forward would be grandfathered.
- It would be easier to put the Design Standards going forward as part of the Site Plan Review because the regulations are more flexible and the regulations of a Site Plan Review do not need to be voted on by the residents of Ashland. If Design Standards were designated as a Zoning Ordinance then every regulation would need to be voted on by the Ashland residents as a warrant article in the Town Report and be voted on once a year. The Planning Board and the business owners would like the Design Standards be part of the Site Plan Review and a category of the town's Master Plan.
- The business owners would like to meet with the Economic Development Committee in Ashland. The focus of the Economic Development Committee is to promote economic development. The businesses would like to work with the Economic Development Committee to see the best way to promote economic development in town.
- Among the suggestions discussed were moving the utility poles along Main Street from the edge of the road to behind businesses and residences along Main Street.
- The business owners would like to see some management of businesses in Ashland and prospective businesses coming to town. It was felt that the process followed by Lincoln where there was little management planning was not the model needed for Ashland. The management model used by Nantucket where the management of the businesses was very restrictive was not the model to follow because it may discourage new businesses from locating in town. It was felt that a less restrictive model with some management was the model to follow.
- The site of the town wells needs to move from a designation of commercial zone to a protected zone to protect the well heads and the town water system from contamination or damage.
- The business owners would like to see a standard size for all business signs. They would like to see more interior signs in local businesses.
- The value of the business goes up with more standard design
- The businesses felt that there should be more parking behind Main Street businesses. The parking issue in the town needs to be addressed.
- The discussion focused on what constitutes "new construction." The business owners felt that if an existing building has more than 75% of its original footprint changed then the building is considered "new construction."
- The town needs to focus on the mill as a redevelopment project. The present site has hazardous waste issues in addition to asbestos in the building's siding and lead paint issues. The town would need to interest a business owner with substantial finances to deal with the present issues and make the site suitable for a 21st century commercial venture.
- A roundabout near Cumberland Farms was discussed briefly but discounted for lack of adequate space and the difficulty of getting tractor trailer trucks through a roundabout.

- The businesses felt that planting smaller trees down Main Street would give the town a more inviting appeal. The Electric Department in the past has frowned on planting trees of any sort since the trees as they mature interfere with the electrical lines running up and down Main Street. **NHDOT** has designated certain small trees that could be planted without interfering with electrical lines.
- The voters at this time don't seem ready to embrace a grant to improve the sidewalks in town.
- The businesses would like to meet with the Economic Development Committee because the committee encourages new businesses to come to Ashland, focuses on the direction the business community could pursue and remain successful, research funding for new businesses, focus on getting ideas and input from businesses and knowledgeable individuals outside Ashland.
- Ashland has the potential for light manufacturing, technical companies who are in need of space as well as a distribution center for smart companies. Ashland has a more than ample water supply and low electric rates.
- The owners of the mill property need to come together and focus on how they might work together to revitalize the property.
- Ashland needs more public parking
- Ashland needs businesses that will draw people to the town: coffee shop, Whitten Woods, boat distributor, bike, hike shop, antique stores, art galleries, art studios, and an art colony. Make Ashland a destination point.
- Ashland is a low income area with a high percentage of apartment dwellers, excellent schools elementary and high school and an excellent starter home community.
- Riveredge and residences along the water would make for an excellent tax base for Ashland. They would be second homes. There would be no children so no expense for education. Ashland could become a destination point with recreation; hiking in Whitten Woods for the residents in these second homes.
- Get additional ideas from the townspeople by taking their ideas and putting together a Lego downtown so the residents can see exactly how their ideas would look.
- A Welcome Sign on an undeveloped property like the Liquor Store would bring down the investment value of the property for a potential new business owner.
- Talk to the Electric Department about possibly burying the electrical lines or moving them behind existing buildings along Main Street to make downtown more visitor friendly.
- Identify possible revenue sources in town.
- The Planning Board and businesses need more engagement and more conversation
- Ashland needs to look at its demographics. Retail businesses would not work in Ashland. Demographics might indicate what sort of employee base the town has and the amount of space the town has for incoming businesses. If we can show job growth in the community might give us more grant opportunities.
- Economic Development needs to meet with the owners of the mill to get some coordination about how to revitalize the property.
- The business owners need to engage and converse with the Economic Development Committee and the Planning Board about design standards and the direction the present business owners see themselves going in the future. More conversation and meetings need to be planned with the Planning Board.

ADJOURNMENT

The Planning Board meeting adjourned at 8 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Paula Hancock