

EAST AMWELL PLANNING BOARD MINUTES
7:30 PM East Amwell Municipal Building
October 8, 2014 - Meeting

Call to Order, Attendance and Pledge of Allegiance

This meeting of the East Amwell Planning Board was opened on October 8, 2014 at 7:30 PM. The following notice was read, "In compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act, this is a regularly scheduled meeting pursuant to the annual meeting notice as published in the January 16, 2014 issue of the Hunterdon County Democrat, a copy of the agenda for this meeting was forwarded to the Hunterdon County Democrat, filed in the Township Clerk's Office and posted on the bulletin board on October 2, 2014."

Present: Roger DeLay
Fred Gardner
Rob Gilbert
Linda Lenox
Don Reilly
Dart Sageser
David Wang-Iverson
Gail Skupien – Alt. #1
Planner Frank Banisch

Excused: Gail Glashoff

Citizens' Privilege to Speak on Items not on the Agenda

Chairman Reilly opened the floor to public comment. Seeing no members of the public come forward, a motion by Fred Gardner, seconded by Roger DeLay to close to the public was unanimously approved.

Review of Minutes

A motion by Roger DeLay, seconded by Linda Lenox to approve the Board's minutes from 9/10/14 with no revisions noted was approved with Ms. Skupien abstaining. Mr. Gardner noted that the comments made by resident Rich Spiegel at the 9/10/14 meeting regarding the taxes on the Plimpton property were inaccurate. He indicated that he had spoken to the Tax Assessor who explained the \$10,000 assessment was on the house, not the vacant land and that if part of the property went into preservation the taxes would decrease slightly but not completely. Mr. Sageser commented that when he had inquired about this matter he was told that, "approximately \$59.00 would come off the taxes."

New Business – Other

Approval: Resolution PB#2014-05: Minor Subdivision Approval with Bulk Variances – D&R Greenway Land Trust, Inc./aka Plimpton & Smith Properties: Block 38 Lots 3 & 3.01 – Rileyville Road

A motion by Fred Gardner, seconded by Roger DeLay to approve Resolution PB#2014-05 was approved by roll call vote.

Roll Call Vote: Fred Gardner: Yes, Roger DeLay: Yes, Linda Lenox: Yes, Dart Sageser: Yes, David Wang-Iverson: Yes, Rob Gilbert: Yes

Discussion – Village Study – Part 1

Chairman Reilly explained that the Township Committee approached the Planning Board about resident concerns they had received regarding the Village District not getting the same level of attention as the Sourland Mountain and Amwell Valley Agricultural Districts. The specific issues the Committee asked the Board to review included traffic, property maintenance and property values.

Mr. Wang-Iverson remarked that 2 visioning sessions were held with residents. He noted that those in attendance provided input on the concerns they had over the Village District. He explained the Village Study Subcommittee then had meetings to discuss the areas in need of attention. An analysis was done and maps were reviewed.

Mr. Wang-Iverson noted that a survey was sent out with 65 responses received from residents and 6 responses received from businesses. He thanked the following village residents for their work on the subcommittee: Joan Stevens, Kat Cannelongo, Maria Souza and Will Harrison as well as Board Members: Don Reilly, Dart Sageser and Planner Slagle.

Planner Banisch commented that livability within the Village District is the top priority with safety and traffic calming being of great importance. He referred to the draft September 2014 Village Study report and noted the following details:

Traffic Calming Techniques

1. Maintaining on-street parking
2. Re-introduce additional landscaping at the intersection – Planner Banisch suggested plantings approximately 2 feet tall that would be substantial enough to deter motorists from driving over them.
3. Reduce the speed limit – Planner Banisch commented on the effectiveness of the blinking speed limit warning signs that tell approaching motorists what the speed is they are traveling at by flashing their current mph number. He remarked that anytime anyone sees these devices they often react by hitting their brakes and slowing down. It was noted that after traffic speed, the safety of the crosswalk at Mom’s Restaurant was the largest concern among residents in the Village.
4. Reduction of pavement width, real and/or perceived – Mr. Sageser suggested striping parking spaces along the roadway and repainting/striping the site triangle at the intersection. Planner Banisch remarked that he does not recommend rumble strips in any residential area because they are very noisy. Mr. Sageser pondered speed bumps and referred to the “Princeton hump.” Mr. Gilbert asked about a traffic light. Planner Banisch commented that the County would have to conduct a study and indicated he doubted the intersection would warrant a traffic light or that they would want to install one because they want to keep traffic moving.

Chairman Reilly stated that Ken Bogan from the County will be at the Planning Board’s November meeting and has stated he is happy to be a liaison between the County and the Board to assist with the Village Study.

Mr. DeLay suggested the Township could take over the maintenance of County Route 179 from Mom’s Restaurant out to State Hwy. Route 202.

A motion by David Wang-Iverson, seconded by Linda Lenox to open to the public for discussion on the traffic calming techniques that were addressed was unanimously approved.

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Frances Gavigan of 123 Wertsville Road came forward and commented that she has been talking with the Freeholders about lowering the speed limit in certain areas of the Township for years and has even provided them with photos of specific roads. She suggested inviting a Freeholder to the Planning Board's November meeting and commented that when public members show up it gets their attention. Ms. Gavigan stated that the deteriorated curbing in front of the Carousel Deli is a problem. She also remarked that when police downgrade speeding tickets because of the points that will be assessed to the driver it inhibits the Township's ability to effectively argue for lower speed limit signage.

Will Harrison of 4 Larison Lane came forward and commented that he was sorry there wasn't another subcommittee meeting prior to tonight's discussion. Chairman Reilly apologized if there was a miscommunication. Mr. Harrison noted that there have been studies done back to 1994 and remarked that many of the recommendations in prior studies have not been implemented. He stated the people who live in the Village would like to see results. He referred to the earlier discussion regarding parking on the street and commented that the County won't implement this because they want to keep the road wide. He added that there has never been much "green" in the intersection and stated the same curb has been at Mom's Restaurant for 50 years. Mr. Harrison also commented on a business being run out of the Black River Railroad Station which employs 18 wheeler tractor trailer trucks that are using Larison Lane as a cut through.

Seeing no other members of the public come forward, a motion by Dart Sageser, seconded by Roger DeLay to close to the public was unanimously approved.

Planner Banisch addressed the Zoning Considerations section of the Village Study. He remarked that the district is intended primarily for single family dwellings with the only exceptions being antique shops and bed and breakfasts with some home occupations as accessory uses. He noted that the permitted uses in the Local Business district are broad. He commented that he didn't believe any major revisions needed to be made to the list of permitted uses but stated the Board should review it to ensure that there aren't any allowed uses that they believe shouldn't be there or any missing appropriate uses that the Board may wish to add.

Mr. Sageser commented that it wasn't clear to him what the advantage is in separating the uses as noted in the Village Study. He remarked there is an "illusion" of what the village is that doesn't seem to be working very well. He clarified that it doesn't effectively address the sense that things can coexist within a village and brought up the importance of getting the library back in town.

Chairman Reilly stated for the record that the Township is engaged in dialogue with the library commission about this very topic and the library has asked for some additional input from the Township.

Mr. Wang-Iverson asked if there is a down side to expanding the permitted uses in the residential zone noting that residents have expressed that the current zoning in the Village is too restrictive. Planner Banisch commented that greater flexibility with home occupations would be manageable as well as live/work spaces where a person has commercial space on the first floor and living space on the second floor which may be something the Board wishes to consider.

Planner Banisch addressed the Community Events and Facilities section of the Village Study. He noted the opportunity for an expanded range of uses with Clawson House and the Park. He expressed that over time the Township may see this area used for a variety of community purposes such as library space, meeting space or a repository of historical items. Planner Banisch commented that the old Grange and

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Oddfellows are small scale, unique properties that could be renovated and possibly used for public good. Mr. Sageser noted that one of those properties is up for tax sale. Chairman Reilly added that one of the properties is extremely limited in its infrastructure to support any activity that may take place there and expressed that the lot itself doesn't exceed much beyond the footprint of the building which makes the septic system problematic.

Mr. Wang-Iverson commented that another concern expressed by residents was the vacant business properties, specifically the former library and PNC Bank locations and asked how to go about recruiting new business. Planner Banisch stated that the key is to figure out what will succeed in those spots. Mr. Wang-Iverson remarked that he believes the Township wants the focal points that have been lost. He noted there is a new ice cream shop on Union Street in Lambertville that could have gone into the former library space. Planner Banisch expressed that the uses associated with walkable neighborhoods are quite different than what exists in East Amwell. He clarified that this is more of a drive-by location. Mr. Sageser suggested reaching out to the owners of the buildings to see if there is anything the Township can do to accommodate business tenants or make the Village more appealing to them.

Planner Banisch suggested an inventory be done to quantify the number of business spaces available in the Village so a strategic approach to marketing them can be developed. Mr. Sageser remarked that he thought there was about 3 to 5 buildings and indicated it would be nice to understand what the issues are with each property in order to establish "synergy."

A motion by Roger DeLay, seconded by Rob Gilbert to open to the public was unanimously approved.

Frances Gavigan of 123 Wertsville Road came forward and referred to the Oddfellows property saying there is 15 acres of land surrounding that lot and it all appears to be owned by the same person. She suggested some of it may be attainable to make the necessary repairs to the Oddfellows property.

Will Harrison of 4 Larison Lane explained that the property behind the Kirkpatrick Church is owned by the Case Estate. He noted the church utilizes an easement on that property for their septic disposal. He suggested that the Oddfellows property could utilize such an easement in order to make the necessary repairs or consideration should be given to tearing down the dilapidated structure.

Mr. Harrison also commented that he would like another Village Study Subcommittee meeting prior to next month's Planning Board meeting in order to get some of the details in the report clarified. Chairman Reilly agreed and commented that he would like to see more public turn out for the November meeting.

Ms. Gavigan of 123 Wertsville Road came forward again and offered to print up flyers to advertise next month's Village Study public hearing.

Seeing no other members of the public come forward, a motion by David Wang-Iverson, seconded by Roger DeLay to close to the public was unanimously approved.

Chairman Reilly noted for the record that the property maintenance aspect of the Village Study will be discussed at next month's Planning Board meeting. He indicated he's hoping to have this draft portion of the study available at least a week prior to the meeting.

Oral Reports

FOSPC – Mr. Gardner noted that FOSPC has not had a meeting but reported that the on-going Scibilia preservation seems to be in the final stages of actually closing. He also reported that Dick Ginman has resigned from the Committee and expressed what an invaluable member he has been.

Agricultural Advisory – Frances Gavigan reported that she had emailed a draft noxious weed ordinance to the Mayor and the Planning Board late this afternoon for their information. Chairman Reilly asked who holds the enforcing authority? Mr. Sageser and Mr. Wang-Iverson commented that they thought possibly the Board of Health but indicated they weren't sure at this point. Ms. Gavigan also reported that the Farm Forum will be Thursday, October 23, 2014 at 7:00 PM with a summer workshop planned to discuss taxes on farm assessed properties in June 2015.

Environmental Commission – Mr. Sageser reported that there are plans to show a Sourland Documentary at the school free of charge but no specific details are available yet. He also noted that there is increasing public agitation regarding the proposed PennEast Pipeline.

PB Secretary – No report was given

Chairman – No report was given

Open to the Public

Chairman Reilly opened the floor to public comment. Seeing no members of the public come forward, a motion by Fred Gardner, seconded by Linda Lenox to close to the public was unanimously approved.

Presentation of Vouchers

A motion by Linda Lenox, seconded by Rob Gilbert to approve the vouchers for payment as listed on the agenda was unanimously approved.

Adjournment

Chairman Reilly adjourned the meeting at 9:40 PM.

Maria Andrews, Administrative Officer