

HOPKINTON PLANNING BOARD

Wednesday, October 11, 2006 7:30 PM
Fire Station Meeting Room, 73 Main St.

MINUTES

PRESENT: Mark Abate, Chairman, R.J. Dourney, Vice Chairman, Sandy K. Altamura, John H. Coolidge, Jaime Goncalves, Claire Wright

.....Elaine C. Lazarus, Planning Director

1. Whitehall Property – Open Space Preservation Funds

Mr. Abate asked Ms. Lazarus to explain the purpose of this agenda item. Ms. Lazarus distributed a fact sheet relative to the 23 acres to be purchased by the Town, noting that Chapter 19 of the Acts of 1999 which created the Open Space Preservation Commission and Open Space Preservation Fund required that expenditures from the Fund be approved by a vote of the Board of Selectmen, Planning Board and Town Meeting. It was noted that Town Meeting voted to purchase the property for \$2,750,000 in May, 2006, consisting of \$1,800,000 in Community Preservation Act funds, \$250,000 from the Open Space Preservation Fund, and \$700,000 in borrowing. It was stated that the current purchase price is \$2,685,000. Ms. Lazarus stated that the Planning Board needs to vote to approve the expenditure of the \$250,000 in order for it to be used for the purchase.

Mr. Dourney stated he is not in favor of allocating the funds for the purchase. He stated it is a beautiful property and he applauds the work of those who have negotiated for the purchase, but he has a fiscal responsibility to the citizens to make sure that money is appropriately spent. He stated the Town has committed to overpay for the property, which is a \$2,000,000 property and at \$2,685,000 it is too much. He stated he couldn't look people in the eye if he approved spending that much.

Ms. Altamura agreed that the Town is probably paying on the high side, but that she would have trouble looking people in the eye if the Town let the property go. She stated that members bring their own ideas to the Board, and she was brought up here and has watched in horror as some land has been developed. She stated she is in favor of spending the \$250,000 and the purchase.

Mr. Coolidge stated that Jeff Doherty should get most of the credit for negotiating the purchase of this property, and it has been a difficult process, about 3 to 4 years in the making. He stated he had asked for and received the support of the Board for town meeting, but didn't remember that a formal vote was needed for the Open Space funds. He stated the Town is paying a fair price – it could have paid less a few years ago, but now it has been through the development process and is worth more because of that. He stated that the Town bought the Cameron property a few years ago for \$1,000,000 and it is worth at least twice that now and more than that to the development community. He stated he supports this purchase. He stated the Inspector

General's office is reviewing it now and he fully expects it to come through cleanly as it has not identified problems with it after previous reviews. He stated the Inspector General's office is looking into complaints from citizens. He noted that the Town is waiting for notification on the Self-Help grant. He noted that if the Town has to close on Oct. 16 before it has been notified of the grant award and because the seller won't grant an extension, then it will be too bad.

Mr. Goncalves stated this is a difficult vote, noting that he has voted to support this before and at Town Meeting. He noted that hearing about spending the money now as related to the appraisal process, he is concerned. He stated that on the other hand, the Town won't be able to get this property back.

Mr. Abate stated it is difficult to value undeveloped land. He stated that the right price is that on which the buyer and seller can agree. He stated that while the price is high, if he was Ron Nation he would back away if the price is lower. He stated that he is comfortable with the price as negotiated and substantiated by an appraisal. He stated he is confident it would be developed if not purchased at this price.

Ms. Wright agreed. She stated she is concerned about what happens if the land is not purchased and everyone wishes that they weren't in this position with respect to the timing issues and appraisals. She stated the Town can't get the property back if it gets developed and Town Meeting voted to buy the property. She noted that a new vote might be different, but it is the will of Town Meeting to buy the land. She stated she would like for people to explore how the Town can get as much use out of the property as it can, finding ways to make it of extra value to the Town. She noted that things could include connecting it to Reed Park, a possible cemetery in the existing cleared area, etc. She suggested that the Town try to use it to the fullest.

Muriel Kramer, 39 North St., stated she is speaking as a resident and this is not a posted meeting of the Board of Selectmen. She stated she has worked on this since becoming Chair of the Board of Selectmen, and it is a beautiful property that exceeds the preservation goals of the Town. She stated it is also the keystone of the Town's water supply and contributes to the unique viewscape around Lake Whitehall. She stated the Town Meeting vote estimated the value at \$2,750,000 and if the Town had not decided to pursue the grant, then it would have purchased the property for that amount in June. She stated the lawyers assisting the Town have said that it has conformed to all legal requirements and she fully expects the Inspector General to ok it. She stated the land will be worth a lot more in the future and she stated it is important to uphold the town meeting vote.

Mary Pratt, 102 Fruit St., stated the State has spent a lot of money upgrading the Lake Whitehall dam and the Town is putting more money into the gatehouse. She stated that the water in this area contributes to the drinking water aquifer and it could be negatively affected by the impacts of development. She stated Hopkinton should avoid the current Lake Cochituate situation. She stated she has been going to Planning Board meetings for 16 years, and a number of years ago several citizens got together and formed the Hopkinton Area Land Trust, which has been plugging along ever since with little money. She noted that after that the Open Space Fund was created which helped and then the CPA has allowed more to be done. She stated open space never decreases in value.

Gail Clifford, 232 Wood St., stated that creation of an ACEC in this area has been a goal of the Planning Board for a few years, and this purchase could be a step toward looking at that again.

Jim Weckback, 273 Wood St., stated he was reminded this evening that not only was the purchase of the land the will of Town Meeting, it was the will of at least 2/3 of Town Meeting. He stated the vote this evening is about \$250,000, not \$2,685,000. He noted that two or three years from now the price will be forgotten.

Ms. Altamura moved that the Planning Board approve the expenditure of funds deposited with the Treasurer of the Town in the Open Space Preservation Fund up to and including the amount of \$250,000.00, such sum to be used toward the purchase of land with buildings thereon from Ronald Nation, Trustee of Wood St. Realty Trust in Hopkinton, Middlesex County, Massachusetts off Wood Street and Piazza Lane ("Premises"). The Premises are described in a deed to Ronald Nation as Trustee of Wood St. Realty Trust dated March 30, 2006 and recorded with Middlesex South District Registry of Deeds in Book 47214, Page 97 and in a deed to Ronald Nation, Trustee of Wood St. Realty Trust dated March 30, 2006 and recorded with Middlesex South District Registry of Deeds in Book 47214, Page 99, or as the premises shall be otherwise bounded and described. The motion was seconded. Mr. Abate, Ms. Altamura, Mr. Coolidge, Mr. Goncalves and Ms. Wright voted in favor of the motion, and Mr. Dourney voted no.

2. East Hopkinton Master Plan

The following members of the Land Use Study Committee were present: Finley Perry, Chairman, Andrew Branz, Stewart Cowart, Muriel Kramer, Mavis O'Leary, Rebecca Robak, and Eric Sonnett. Mr. Coolidge is a member of both the Planning Board and Land Use Study Committee. Fred Merrill, James Miner and Ken Golding, Sasaki Associates, and Thomas Lavash, Economics Research Associates, appeared before the Board.

Mr. Perry introduced the representatives and described the goals for the meeting. Mr. Merrill stated they will show a model of how they would present information at a public engagement so that at the next public meeting in November, they would be used to summarize previous visioning exercises in Town. He stated that using the SmartPlan model, they can project land use options and project the impacts of each. Mr. Miner showed maps of potential development parcels and developable land within the study area, and a general potential development scheme for each. Details of the schemes were reviewed and discussed.

Mr. Dourney asked if he could get a copy of the model's assumptions, and the reply was yes. Mr. Abate asked how the model responds to market changes over time. Mr. Lavash stated that they do their best to make forecasts, considering economic cycles over time. He stated there is an art to market analysis. Mr. Perry stated that people need to think very long range here, and plan for over time – a few generations from now. He stated people need to look beyond now and beyond the next 5 years. Mr. Branz asked how uses not included in the model now can be fit into the development scenarios, such as golf courses and college campuses, for example. Mr. Merrill stated they can do that if some uses are identified for them to incorporate.

Mr. Lavash stated the issue is how to competitively position Hopkinton, and there is a lot of competition. He stated that setting aside parcels without designated uses could be a possibility too, to respond to change over time.

Mr. Perry asked how this information should be taken to the community and how they can be engaged. Ms. Kramer asked if regional features are captured by the model, such as public transportation. It was stated that it could be built into the model with data.

Mr. Merrill stated that the identification of community goals, such as revenue positive outcomes, percent open space, mix of housing types, traffic impacts, etc. is important. He stated that if the Town has done visioning and identified these, they could use that information to formulate scenarios. It was stated that the consultants will be provided with any prior visioning information which they don't already have.

It was agreed that the next meeting with the consultants should follow this format:

1. What you've told us (a summary of visioning outcomes)
2. Buildout under existing zoning, using the model
3. Area is all open space, using the model
4. Three scenarios based on Town visioning outcomes.

Ms. Robak addressed the traffic impact issue, stating the Town needs to look at a wider road transportation network than just the study area and constructing a possible bypass road from East Main St. to Rt. 85 north of Rt. 135. She noted that the capacity of Rt. 85 and the constraints of the low railroad bridge in Southborough could be an issue with that.

Mr. Dourney left the meeting at this time.

The next steps and future meetings were discussed. A question was raised about possible rezoning for this area and if it was possible or desirable for it to be on the warrant for the 2007 annual town meeting. It was noted that new zoning for this area of Town should probably be discussed at a special town meeting solely for that purpose.

Adjourned: 9:30 PM

Elaine C. Lazarus, Planning Director

Approved: October 30, 2006