

**Master Plan Action Committee Meeting
Thursday, June 8, 2006, 7 pm
Hawlemont Regional School**

Present: Neal Lear, Bill and Norma Coli, John Hoffman, Amy Wales, Josh Smith, Susanne Willard, Ruth Cannavo, Bill Stephens, Gisela Walker
Peggy Sloan, Planning Director, FRCOG; Greg Lewis, reporter

1. The Committee discussed a few specific points re the draft use table for the zoning revisions:
 - Allowing multifamily housing in the rural-residential district. There was consensus that well-designed multi-family houses for up to 4 units can fit well into a residential neighborhood and may provide more affordable housing.
 - Based on the present struggle in town over the paintball application, we discussed whether there was a way of making such decisions easier by being more specific about recreational uses. Members felt that there was no predicting what kind of recreation may be coming down the pike in the future; however, that we could look at outdoor vs indoor recreation or recreation business headquarters vs. actual recreational sites... Peggy Sloan agreed to look at this issue again for the next draft.
2. Mohawk Scenic Protection had ranked highly in the public meetings around the Master Plan and the town meeting survey. Members discussed what kinds of uses they found objectionable along the Trail because they would detract from its scenic value and its ability to draw tourists into town. Truck lots, large billboards, strip malls, stand-alone ATMs, self-storage units, large parking lots, flea markets were mentioned; discussion arose about the attractiveness of generic chain stores that would force their brand design on the structures such as golden arches. Members tended to agree that for many of these uses it becomes a matter of design, setback and integration into the landscape which is why the proposed new site plan review feature in the zoning regs for commercial projects will be an important tool.]
3. Peggy Sloan then gave a short power point presentation about the concept of '**cluster**' subdivisions also called open-space subdivisions.
(This presentation can be found on the Internet at www.mass.gov/envir/smart_growth_toolkit/pages/SG-slides-osrd.html
Another website explaining the concept of an open space or conservation subdivision is <http://commpres.env.state.ma.us/content/csd.asp>)

People appreciated the visuals. These helped with understanding the concept of allowing smaller individual lot sizes in a subdivision so that the 'saved' space can be set aside as open space for the overall attractiveness of the development and public use of the home owners or even all residents of town. This discussion then segued into whether we would want to consider **increasing the minimum lot size in town and where.**

What follows is a summary of the kind of points that were made and discussed and re-discussed and will most definitely be discussed again:

4. Right now Charlemont requires a minimum lot size of one acre anywhere in town. This means that the one acre needs to accommodate the house plus driveway, maybe a garage, the septic system and the private well within the setbacks from the lot lines required by state or town law. Within the sewer district in the Village at least the public sewer can decrease the amount of space needed; in the rural areas, however, - given ledge, wetlands, slope and poor soils - Title 5 requirements and well protection often do not fit on one acre. The town assessors already assume that a building lot is made up of one and a half acre as very few new private residences are actually being accommodated on one acre. The MPAC members discussed the pros and cons of increasing the minimum lot size in the rural residential district.

On the pro-side: it would codify what is already going on; it would also spread out development a bit, reduce the ultimate number of houses Charlemont can absorb in terms of services, and make it easier to retain the rural character we all so value. Increased lot size would go hand in hand with an increase in frontage requirements. So, rather than see a driveway along our rural roads every 150 feet, they could be spread out to every 200 or 250 feet making us look less like New Jersey.

The impact could be relatively easily determined for **ANR development:** under the present frontage and lot size requirements along our existing roads we *could* build roughly 1,000 additional ANR lots (assuming all required features would fit on 1 acre). A rough guess then would reduce that number to 500 additional houses if we doubled these requirements.

The above calculations do not pertain to the scenario of multi-lot subdivisions which could add many times the above number to the residences in town. This is where the concept of the cluster subdivisions meets the increased minimum lot size issue: if the town had a two acre minimum lot size, then we could allow a developer to cluster his/her houses on one acre lots and reserve the additional, 'saved' acre as open space. This could work as Title 5 allows shared septic systems to use the set aside open space. The resulting subdivisions would look more like small village clusters rather than like the cookie-cutter equal-sized lot patterns we see out east where development has moved ahead faster than out here.

On the con side – negative aspects of increasing lot size: If a **landowner** owns 10 acres he/she will assume that about 9 to 10 lots could be sold as building lots. In reality it may not turn out that way, and the assessors already assume only 6 or seven lots will be buildable but nevertheless there is a potential loss in return from the sale of the land. The profit would most likely would not be cut in half as a larger lot may be more attractive and sell for more but may not sell for twice that much. Some of that increased value would come to the pockets of the **developer** who would sell a larger house on a larger lot for more money. Larger lots may also be assessed higher so that the **town** would benefit from having to serve fewer residences while still collecting increased tax revenues. The **person**

wanting to build a house would need to buy two acres rather than one - which makes the house less affordable.

Opinions varied considerably on the above points.

In a very tentative summary it seemed to make sense to discuss this issue with the larger community; to suggest that the Village Residential District that surrounds the Village center remain at one acre minimum lot size as it is inside the Sewer District and being in walking distance to the center, it makes sense to focus affordable housing there.

The ability to cluster subdivisions depends upon increasing the minimum lot size in the rural residential district. This means that we cannot assume to make this part of our zoning revisions until we have a sense of how that would fly in town.

Peggy Sloan will put together a first draft of the revised zoning for the next MPAC meeting.

The MPAC will continue to meet in the summer to meet the deadlines of the grant under which we are working. The next meeting will be on Thursday, July 13, 2006. Everyone is encouraged to make time for this important process of developing new zoning for town.

Gisela Walker,
MPAC Chair
7/3/06