

MPAC Meeting November 9, 2006
7pm Hawlemont School
Minutes

Present: John Hoffman, Dan Miller, Doug White, Neal Lear, Amy Wales, Bill Stephens, Gisela Walker; Peggy Sloan, Planning Director, FRCOG

?Minutes from August 10 approved unanimously

Discussion about the value of the Mohawk trail as a scenic asset for the town both in economic terms, and as a visual enjoyment for residents:

Members agreed that the Trail is still a scenic attraction for tourists though the creation of the MA Turnpike and I 91 have diverted some of the fall tourist stream to Vermont and the southern Berkshires. The Deerfield River by itself may have surpassed the Trail as a magnet for tourists but these two features are interrelated. It follows then that the protection of the scenic qualities of the Trail and the careful guidance of development there are of economic advantage to the town as a whole so that we do not "kill the goose that lays the golden eggs". It would also help with protecting the property values along the Trail. Members present felt that there was town-wide support for this.

We also agreed that the value of the Trail should not only be defined in terms of economic benefit to businesses but that its scenic beauty is one of those unquantifiable features we all enjoy on a daily basis and often don't register until we have lost it.

Developing criteria for Site Plan Review

At the last public meeting about the zoning revisions it was suggested that the MPAC develop specific criteria for the SPR process. PSloan and GWalker had assembled samples from various other towns. The Committee reviewed those and assembled criteria appropriate for Charlemont. (see attached). These will accompany the presently available zoning draft document until we integrate them into the next revisions.

Discussion: The pros and cons of 'all power to the Planning Board' vs. increasing 'by right uses' in the Village Centers.

At the public meetings people had raised concerns over the introduction of By Right uses and the loss of control this represents for abutters to oppose a development in the village centers. The present system of submitting all developments to a Special Permit process offers such opportunity for public input, opposition and conditions. By Right uses, on the other hand, provide reassurance to developers/business owners that their project will be approved. Members reviewed the uses that are given By Right status in the proposed zoning revisions and recommended that a few of them be required to go through the Site Plan Review process which would require a public hearing and allow public input on lay out and design but would not allow turning a project down altogether.

We also discussed how the present system of all projects going through the Planning Board affects the workload of the Board and how it tends to focus the conflicting opinions about a project in town on the members of the Planning Board and is likely to increase litigation because it is always an option. This could have major consequences on the town budget.

? Next round of public outreach

1)There will be an all All-Board meeting on December 12 at the Hawlemont School at 7pm to allow Board and Commission members to discuss in detail how the proposed zoning would

impact collaboration among them. The Sewer Commission has been invited as well.

2)The next MPAC meeting date *December 14* will be set aside for a meeting with business owners in the Village Centers.

3)On Thursday, *January 11* there will be a general public meeting at the Mohawk Park Restaurant at 7pm to give West Charlemonsters a chance to learn about the zoning revisions.

4)A meeting in East Charlemont is in the planning stages; any help would be welcome.

Other Business

GWalker reported regarding negotiations with **Mass Highway**: there is a new Regional Director for our region; the FRCOG will be meeting with him on November 28, 06 and will raise the issue of how to work with Charlemont on the design of the Rte. Re-surfacing through town. It is hoped that a separate meeting about this will then be set with representatives from town.

Gisela Walker
MPAC Chair