

## **Economic Development and Sustainability Committee**

### **North Yarmouth Village Center Plan**

#### **Public Meeting on May 23, 2013**

#### **Minutes**

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##### **Overview:**

Al Ahlers, EDSC chair, opened the meeting around 7:15 pm. He presented an overview of the proposed Town Village Center Plan, and stated that the purpose of tonight's meeting was to present the plan to the public. Funding for Phase I of the plan would be the subject of a proposed Town Meeting warrant article requesting a \$150,000 bond. He explained the Committee's work in developing a multi-phase plan that was designed to promote economic activity and vitality in the village center. He also introduced members of the Committee (Bill and Sarah Hopkins, Katie Murphy, Andy Walsh, and Dave Perkins). Next he asked Consultant, Pat Carroll, to present the plan.

##### **Presentation of the Plan by Pat Carroll, Carroll Associates, Landscape Architect:**

Pat Carroll explained his work with the Committee over the past 6 months in developing the proposal, including schematics of the plan and cost estimates.

Site Analysis: Pat presented a site analysis schematic and identified the issues to be addressed, including the lack of clarity about the location of town hall, and that the town hall campus is not well-connected to other areas of the village (no vehicular or pedestrian connections). He also noted assets, such as the athletic fields, Memorial forest, Toddy Brook green-space, and the fact that the town owned about 120 acres of contiguous land in the village. He noted that while the Toddy Brook gulley could be considered a constraint, it could be used as a pedestrian-friendly, green space that enhances the connectedness of the area. He also noted that signage at either end of the Memorial Highway segment adjacent to the property could be designed as gateways to the village.

He noted that a very important part of the plan should be to maintain a screened buffer between the activities on the town land and the adjacent residents. He noted that the town had a 50 foot right-of way across one of the residential properties that connected the athletic field to Parsonage Road.

*Neighbor Comment: A neighbor expressed concern about maintaining the buffer and questioned the status of the right-of-way.*

Pat responded that Phase I did not include doing anything with the right-of-way, but that it was a part of the inventory and might be considered for a future pedestrian connection.

Conceptual Master Plan: Pat explained that a major purpose of the conceptual master plan was to maintain and enhance the areas and existing uses along Route 115 and along the Memorial Highway through selective clearing of vegetation to make the town hall, Westcustogo Hall, and other uses more visible and inviting. The

pedestrian trails and bridge over Toddy Brook would provide a pleasant connection between Route 115, the Wescustogo Hall area, and the town hall area. The concept plan also showed a possible future road extension between the Town Office and Route 115, and a possible pedestrian path between the Town Office campus and Parsonage Road utilizing the 50 foot right-of-way discussed previously tonight. Pat emphasized that the idea was to improve aesthetics and visibility to make both sides of the Town Office more attractive for public interaction. The concept plan also suggested maintaining the athletic fields, and noted that the Historical Society was considering a plan to relocate the Old Town House to the campus area, where it could be used to showcase the town's history. An historic garden had also been suggested. Regarding the rental house, there were thoughts about be renovated as a community meeting space that could provide rental income. Pat also suggested that the plan might spur interest in additional commercial development in the southern end of triangle.

Pat noted that the enhancement of the Town Center triangle was a first step designed to encourage interest in potential development opportunities in Cassidy Pit and at the Memorial School site, if it becomes town-owned.

**Phase I Plan:** Pat explained that the Phase I proposal was what is to be funded through the request for bonding at the upcoming Town meeting in June. Specifically, the project would entail:

- A new sidewalk from the Route 115 and Memorial Highway intersection northward along the east side of Route 115 to Wescustogo Hall
- Selective thinning and clearing – along the Route 115 side of the town property up to the location of a potential connector road (improved pedestrian path?) and along Route 9 to improve the visibility of the Town Hall.
- Construction of a trail and 75 foot bridge across Toddy Brook to connect Route 115 and the Town Office Campus

Pat emphasized that the Phase I plan is a basic, first step to the proposed project. If approved by the voters, the next step would be surveying and more detailed design work.

## **Public Questions and Comments:**

*(Public Questions and Comments are in italics)*

Al Alhers then opened the meeting up for public questions and input.

*Public Question/Comment: Don't disturb the ravine because there are many special plants, water seeps making it muddy to walk in, and the bridge would present safety issues. It is easy to walk around the area, don't need this connection. People like the area the way it is. It will be expensive to move the Old Town House, not sure it is a good idea anyway. He doesn't like idea of town borrowing money. The real constraint to economic development is the comprehensive plan and the ground water overlay regulations – these should be changed. There is already vacant commercial space that isn't being developed due to the regulations. He was concerned about the community becoming more socialist, potentially leading to communism. He noted that it was expensive to live in the town.*

*Neighbor: She was concerned about the use of the 50 foot right-of-way because it would encourage people to park at the entrance along Parsonage Road which would be unsafe because there is considerable fast-moving*

*traffic using the road to cut across between Route 115 and Memorial Highway. She also asked that no cutting be done in the Memorial Park forest area.*

Pat Carroll/Dave Perkins responded that the use of the right-of-way for a pedestrian access was only an idea, not a part of the Phase I plan. Also, there was no suggestion that anything be done to the Memorial Park forest, and if fact, the Committee may actually prefer that it be left as it is. Dave noted that the Committee had discussed a sidewalk all the way around the triangle, including along Parsonage Road, but that it would be a very expensive project that could be considered in the future.

*Public Question/Comment: How much has the town spent on this project already? He was not sure cutting trees was a good idea. He is very concerned about the costs associated with the project. He thinks this effort is premature, given the uncertainty about Memorial School. Doesn't think the town should sell its land to businesses – town should keep its land. The trail system and bridge might be good ideas. He prefers the wilder look of the area. How is this project going to promote economic development?*

Al Alhers/Dave Perkins responded that less than \$20,000 has been spent on the project so far. Dave explained how Phase I was designed to be a first step to encourage economic development - jobs, property tax revenues for commercial/industrial development. The effort would bring more people to the area, which would provide more business for existing businesses and provide an incentive for new economic investment.

*Public Comment: Businesses outside the village area will not benefit from things like a new sidewalk.*

Andy Walsh explained his work on developing a design and approach for the bridge that would reduce the cost. His engineered design is for a 75 foot long, 6 foot wide, wood-frame (pressure treated) bridge with a guard rail. The bridge would be designed to address safety concerns, and to have an estimated 25+ year life-span. The cost could be reduced from \$75,000 to \$50,000 with volunteer efforts.

*Public Question/Comment: Improved signage for the Town Office is needed. Also, a playground on the corner of the ball field would be good.*

Pat Carroll responded that improved signage was discussed, but that it is not a part of the Phase I proposal. Making the town hall and other facilities more visible from the highways was the first step.

*Public Question/Comment (Paul Hodges): The Recreation Committee is against any proposal that would eliminate or make smaller the recreation/ball field. The playground and a pedestrian pathway across the 50 foot right-of-way might be problematic. Also, he was concerned about the cost of the project, and any proposal to move Public Works.*

Al Alhers responded that while the Town is requesting a \$150,000 bond issue for Phase I, it has identified two to three sources of grant funding for the trail, sidewalk, and tree planting. The bond would be used as match for these grants, which would then leave bond money for future projects.

Dave Perkins explained that the Committee discussed many options, which are ideas at this point, and don't necessarily reflect a consensus of the Committee. The playground, pedestrian connection using the 50 foot

right-of-way, changes to Public Works, future uses of Cassidy Pit and the Memorial School property are just ideas at this time.

*Public Question/Comment: He said he might support commercial development for part of Cassidy Pit, but felt it was important to keep some/most of it. It was a big step when the town purchased it for gravel. He was also concerned about the impacts on neighbors, and cautioned about using grants because they may not always benefit taxpayers.*

Dave Perkins said the overall goal is to get more people into the village to spur job growth and economic development. Is this what the community wants?

*Public Question/Comment: So this is an economic stimulus program to improve the property tax mix.*

Dave Perkins said, yes, that the effort was designed to stimulate economic activity. The Committee actually did some economic analysis to look at the number of jobs created and property tax revenues that would result from different uses. That information is available.

*Public Question/Comment: Is this information on the WEB page?*

Dave Perkins/Katie Murphy: It should be on the WEB in the powerpoint presentations used at prior public meetings. Someone would check into this.

Dave Perkins indicated that more discussion is needed on many of these ideas, such as moving the Old Town House, use of the recreation field, etc.

*Public Question/Comment: Concerned about how high property taxes are; noted that high taxes are mostly due to schools.*

*Public Question/Comment: What about Wescustogo Hall?*

Al Alhers responded that the Phase I Plan does not address future use of Wescustogo Hall, but that, generally, Committee members felt it was an important asset because it supported social activities in the village. He also emphasized that the purpose of this hearing was to discuss Phase I of the proposed Village Center Plan.

Katie Murphy noted that the town has changed from its historic agricultural routes, and needs to respond to those changes. Phase I is designed to create more energy, interest and focus for the community consistent with current times.

*Public Question/Comment: Need to also change land use regulations and get more from the Yarmouth Water District in return for protecting the public water supply.*

*Public Question/Comment: Be sure to inventory the property for important natural resources, such as plant and animal habitats, so they can be preserved during projects (trail, bridge building, trimming and clearing). Could consult with the Conservation Commission and/or a naturalist on this.*

*Public Question/Comment: North Yarmouth and its citizens are actually doing OK economically. Don't get rid of town property, improve it.*

Andy Walsh said he located his business in North Yarmouth because it was a nice place to live, even though it might have been a better business decision to locate someplace else.

Al Alhers indicated that the Committee has discussed amending the comprehensive plan and land use regulations, and that this will likely be pursued in the future.

Steve Palmer (Selectman) indicated that the Selectmen will be meeting with the Yarmouth Water District next week (Tuesday evening) to look at a number of issues, such as identifying the exact location of the aquifer recharge area and options for relaxing the regulations governing the aquifer protection zone.

Adjournment:

There being no further comments or questions, Al Alhers adjourned the meeting at 8:45 p.m.

Attendance:

Al/Carol Dubay  
Linette Jones  
Mark L. Smith  
Bill Jones  
Sandra J. Boynton  
Paul Hodgetts  
Jim Moulton  
Audrey Lohnes  
Darla Hamlin  
Paul Napolitano  
Dave Perkins  
Tina Keene  
Bill Hopkins  
Andy Walsh  
Jim Howe  
Pam Ames  
Katie Murphy  
Steve Palmer  
Al Alhers  
Pat Carroll  
Gwen Hilton