

**MINUTES OF WORKSHOP
HELD BY THE PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION
JANUARY 18, 2017**

ROLL CALL:

Members Present: Eric Prause, Chair
Andy Kidd, Vice Chair
Jessica Scorso
Timothy Bergin

Alternate Member Sitting: Julian Stoppelman

Alternates: Patrick Kennedy
Teresa Ike

Absent: Michael Stebe, Secretary

Also Present: Gary Anderson, Director of Planning
Renata Bertotti, Senior Planner
Kyle Shiel, Senior Planner
Katie Williford, Administrative Secretary

Time Convened: 8:23 p.m.

MANCHESTER GREEN REPORT AND NEXT STUDY AREA

Mr. Anderson said staff would like to review the implementation recommendations from the Manchester Green report and discuss what the next study area would be.

Staff distributed a summary of the recommendations. Mr. Anderson noted that recommendations A, B, and C dealt with infrastructure and how the streets line up. Some of the recommendations would be easier to implement than others, he said. For example, the Town could encourage the State, when they reline Middle Turnpike, to reduce it from four lanes to two if appropriate. That would reduce traffic speeds and make crossings more manageable. There are also some sidewalk gaps, and addressing that could be in the capital budget.

Redesigning the intersection would be a larger undertaking and would be a State-driven activity because it is a state road, Mr. Anderson said. CROCOG and the state do corridor studies occasionally, and if this is a priority, the Town could encourage them to look into it. Part of the intersection was redone about 10 years ago, so this is not something that has not been looked at, he said.

Mr. Anderson said that recommendations D, E, and F are the areas where the Commission would be most active. One recommendation is to look at the zoning. This area is zoned Special Design Commercial Business Zone (SDC). The Commission could consider whether the 50-foot setback is appropriate, given that it does not match some of the historical development there. The Manchester Green report also discusses shared parking, so the Commission could consider whether encouraging, allowing, or requiring shared parking in certain areas would be

appropriate, he said. The SDC zone only allows multifamily residential units as part of a mixed use building, so when people inquired about the old Hanshaw furniture building, Planning staff had to tell them they could not have apartments there without a retail component. The Commission could consider whether that requirement is inhibiting the use of that property, he said. Ms. Bertotti noted that shared commercial and residential real estate involves separation requirements and building and fire code requirements that have to be met, which are very expensive for that type of building. In addition, she said, more parking is required for retail than for residential property.

The last two recommendations on the list, items G and H, relate to the Senior Center, Mr. Anderson said. It would be important to include the Senior Center and Senior and Family Services in the conversation if the Commission talks about making wider use of the Senior Center parking lot.

Mr. Anderson asked whether the Commission was interested in looking at items D, E, and F. He also asked how critical the Commission felt the function of the intersection was, and how hard the Town should push to change that.

Mr. Bergin said, in general, he was in favor of a minimalist approach or a good return on investment approach. He suggested moving the bus stop from the island on the town green to a more accessible location, which he thought would not be expensive to do.

Mr. Anderson said that staff is also working on a complete streets policy. This would be a good location to keep in mind the needs of all users, including cars, bicyclists, and pedestrians. A road diet could be done here, making the road go from four lanes to three or two lanes, which would allow a wider shoulder and might allow a bike lane.

Regarding the challenges of redeveloping the former mills, Mr. Bergin said he would not have a problem with specifying through the regulations that those specific historic properties could be used entirely for residential.

Mr. Stoppelman said he would like to see something done with the property surrounding the Department of Social Services, such as housing or multiple unit housing. He noted that the property has been for sale for a number of years.

Mr. Prause asked if there were other areas in town that were zoned SDC. Ms. Bertotti said the only other areas were on Deming Street and Avery Street. Mr. Prause said the SDC zone seemed more limiting than it is beneficial. Mr. Anderson noted that, because it is a gateway, the idea was to have some control over the design; however, the dimensional requirements do not match up with what is there. Ms. Bertotti said she did not think zoning was that much of a problem in the district, although the properties not allowing residential on the first floor was a challenge. The main issue, she said, is the fact that there is opportunity for shared parking, but it is inaccessible.

Mr. Prause noted that the regulation allowing residential above the first floor was added in 2014 because there was no residential use allowed in the zone at that time. He suggested the Commission might want to consider removing the restriction prohibiting residential use on the first floor. Mr. Anderson asked what the reason was for the restriction. Ms. Bertotti replied that all residential use that was added as part of that amendment was above the first floor, and it applied to all business zones. The idea was to prevent parcels in commercial zones from

becoming residential, she said. However, this district is different because it already has a mixture of uses.

Mr. Kidd said that developers usually do not hesitate to request a zone change or a variance if needed. He asked if there was any indication that the current regulations are discouraging development in this area. Mr. Anderson said the only indication of that was the fact that people had specifically asked about using the Hanshaw Furniture building for residential use.

Mr. Kidd said that the parking in the area needs to be addressed. If there were shared parking, the location and access to it would need to be figured out. Mr. Anderson said, if shared parking were an option, that would at least allow a developer to use some creativity and figure out a solution.

Ms. Scorso asked if there had been any interest in the CHR building. Ms. Bertotti said someone had come in about five years ago with a concept plan to have a row of townhouses along those two back streets, but then the applicant backed out for financial reasons. Mr. Stoppelman said that CHR had moved, but a large number of cars use that lot. Mr. Anderson said he would look into that, and noted that the corner there was going through environmental remediation. Mr. Stoppelman said they built parking behind that remediation.

Mr. Kennedy said the easiest thing would be to make the Senior Center parking lot a regular municipal lot available to serve surrounding businesses, because the Town could do that unilaterally. Putting in crosswalks could be done relatively easily without a large expense, he said. He was in favor of considering changes to the SDC zone regulations, but cautioned that some changes might be beneficial for the Manchester Green area but not for the Deming Street area. Mr. Kennedy said that a realignment of the intersection did not seem viable in the foreseeable future, given the State's financial situation.

A member of public who was present stated that the area is a hazard for bicyclists because there is no shoulder and drivers do not pay attention.

Mr. Anderson asked if there was parking on the extra road section and Mr. Shiel said there was parallel parking there. Mr. Kidd noted that it was confusing for drivers unfamiliar with the area to get into the Swiss Cleaners and the other properties there. Ms. Bertotti said signage and some road changes could go a long way to help the situation, but she did not know how realistically soon that could happen. Mr. Kidd said the Town should not give up on changes, because if they don't get put in the queue they will never happen. Mr. Anderson said he thought that road striping was not that much of a challenge because they restripe the road every few years anyway.

Mr. Prause asked what the feedback was on changing the intersection to a roundabout. Mr. Shiel said that idea never got past the conceptual stage.

Mr. Prause asked if there is any value to that north service road that confuses drivers. Mr. Anderson said it primarily serves as parking and access to those businesses. Mr. Kidd said it would be helpful to understand what the reasoning was behind the creation of that road.

Mr. Prause thought a roundabout might make the area more walkable instead of crossing four lanes of traffic. He asked if adding trees on the south side of Middle Turnpike would be feasible. Mr. Anderson said it would not be difficult, but it would have to be a state project because it is a state road.

Mr. Kidd asked what the process would be to get the state to do a study. Mr. Anderson said if the Town were interested in changing something, it could come up with some concepts and would have to have a corridor study, which would need to go through CRCOG or the state Department of Transportation. The Town would have to put resources into it, which is a conversation that has not happened yet. It would have to go through the regional agency or directly to the DOT, and they have a list of projects they prioritize, he said.

Mr. Kidd said he thought this might be a prime place for a roundabout. He saw this as a two-pronged approach, doing things like restriping and crosswalks in the short term, then doing a study and having a more comprehensive strategy for the long term. The Commission should take a hard look at how to improve parking in the area, he said. He also said the Commission could consider amending the regulations to allow residential use on the first floor as a special exception, to give more flexibility.

Mr. Anderson noted that roundabouts are not always more pedestrian friendly, because they keep cars moving and can make it difficult to cross. Mr. Kennedy noted that a roundabout would impact property owners in the area and might involve eminent domain. He said that other changes would be more achievable for less cost.

Mr. Kennedy asked how salvageable the Hanshaw Furniture building is. Mr. Anderson said it was not in great shape. The realtor wanted to market it for residential use for the whole building, but they were not able to due to the restriction preventing residential on the first floor. Mr. Kidd asked if the building had any historical significance that would make it a problem to demolish it. Mr. Anderson said he thought the Historical Society owned the yellow house next door and had expressed interest in the Hanshaw Furniture building. He thought there would be some pushback from people in town who are interested in historic buildings.

Ms. Bertotti asked if the Commission would like to discuss which area to focus on next. The other corridors that were discussed before were Spencer Street, Robertson School, Depot Square, Buckland, and Sanrico Drive, she said.

Mr. Bergin and Mr. Prause said the two frontrunners in previous conversations were Depot Square and Spencer Street. Mr. Shiel said the interns started some preliminary research on Spencer Street before they left. Mr. Anderson said that Spencer Street is interesting because there is a lot going on there now, and Depot Square is interesting because there are a lot of different challenges there. He noted that staff has been working on a Parks and Recreation plan, and the idea is to try to think ahead about these resources and how they could be connected; there are a lot of those resources in the Depot Square area, such as the Community Y, Robertson Park, and the rail line.

Mr. Stoppelman suggested looking at Spencer Street next, but Mr. Kennedy said that Spencer Street is taking care of itself, while Depot Square is not. Mr. Kidd said that Union Pond, in back of Depot Square, is a valuable asset that is underused. Mr. Prause said that there would most likely be more community engagement surrounding Depot Square. Ms. Scorso said discussions of park planning would spark interest. Mr. Shiel said that Robertson Park connects to Union Pond Park, and the trail loops around and connects to Northwest Park, so there could be a park district.

ALTERNATIVE ENERGY GENERATION STRUCTURES

Mr. Shiel said he had done research on alternative energy accessory structures, mainly focused on solar. Seven communities responded about how they regulate their structures. Definitions differentiate between roof-mounted structures or structures mounted on the ground, either on a pole or in some type of array. Roof-mounted structures are mostly permitted by right. Ground or pole-mounted structures are by special permit and are mostly prohibited in the front yard. For dimensional requirements, most of the towns use the underlying zoning applied to other accessory structures. Whether or not the accessory structure counts towards lot coverage depends on whether or not the area is paved, Mr. Shiel said.

Mr. Anderson asked how these types of structures are treated now. Ms. Bertotti replied that they are treated as accessory structures, but for solar structures that are mounted on poles, there is no area, so the only dimension that can be used is height. She noted that the one offensive solar structure in town was permitted in accordance with the accessory structure regulations. It is in the side yard of a corner lot, clearly visible from the street.

Ms. Bertotti said that the height of accessory structures is typically measured to mid roof pitch. She was not sure how the Zoning Enforcement Officer measured height in the case of solar panels, but if he measured to the midpoint of the slope, the highest part could be quite high for large panels.

Mr. Anderson asked if the Commission was interested in regulating alternative energy generation structures. Mr. Prause was in favor of coming up with a definition, and Mr. Kidd thought the Commission should decide how to measure them. Mr. Anderson asked whether such structures should be prohibited in the front yard. Ms. Bertotti said that accessory structures are not allowed in the front yard, but on a corner lot, one side facing the street is considered the side yard even though it faces the street. Ms. Bertotti confirmed that accessory structures are allowed in the side yard.

Ms. Bertotti noted that there was a pending application for a solar array scheduled to come before the Commission, which would be for a special exception. Fortunately, that particular solar array needed special exception approval; otherwise, Ms. Bertotti said, she would not know what to do, because this type of structure is not defined.

Mr. Bergin suggested regulating the height of the structure and the size of the structure that the post is holding up. He did not think roof-mounted solar panels needed to be addressed.

Mr. Stoppelman said he did not have a problem with large arrays in industrial or farm areas where they would be far from the street, but there should be a way of regulating the size of structures in residential areas. Ms. Scorso asked how the Commission should regulate for residential use vs. an elective town array. Mr. Shiel said that some towns differentiate between solar structures to heat a home's hot water vs. those intended to generate electricity and feed it back into the grid.

Mr. Kidd liked the idea of regulating size based on some ratio involving the size of the lot. Mr. Prause noted that one of the model ordinances listed in Mr. Shiel's summary refers to the surface area being calculated regardless of the angle the system is mounted at. Ms. Bertotti said there are dimensional maximums for accessory structures of certain kinds, such as a certain amount of square footage for a shed or garage. She suggested the Commission could figure out what is

appropriate for the size of the lot in the zoning district, and use that. Mr. Kidd said there are different measurements for an array depending on how it is angled, but there is a theoretical bounding box around it, which encloses the maximum height and width of the array no matter what angle it is at.

Ms. Bertotti asked if the Commission was interested in regulating wind related structures. She said she had not received any questions about that subject yet and she did not think Manchester's topography lends itself to that type of project. Mr. Anderson said he thought they would probably need to come to the Commission anyway due to their height. Mr. Bergin suggested looking at the ability to put windmills in side yards.

Mr. Prause asked whether design standards should be imposed for colors or compatibility. Ms. Bertotti said, for accessory structures in residential zones, that would be approved by the Zoning Enforcement Officer. Determining compatibility based on one person's taste was not a good idea, she said. Mr. Kennedy agreed.

Ms. Bertotti said that she would come up with some draft language for the Commission to review before it becomes an official application.

The workshop ended at 9:36 p.m.

I certify these minutes were adopted on the following date:

February 1, 2017
Date

Eric Prause, Chairman

NOTICE: A DIGITAL RECORDING OF THIS WORKSHOP CAN BE HEARD IN THE PLANNING DEPARTMENT.

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