

GROTON PLANNING BOARD

MAY 4, 2006

MINUTES

Chairman Clements called the meeting to order at 7:30 PM in the Town Hall

Members present: Clements, Barringer, Degen, Eliot, Perkins and Wilson

Member absent: Lewis

DESIGN GUIDELINES

The Board met with Peter Flinker of Dodson Associates to discuss the April 6, 2006 draft of the Design Guidelines. The Board agreed that the guidelines are a good start, but more illustrative examples should be included in the final document.

Member Degen said it is important to include a section on signage in the document. Mr. Flinker said the issue of signage should be a separate discussion, but he would add a paragraph about signs.

Andy Field of Broadmeadow Sign Studio said Newburyport is an example of a community with good signage. He said there are many good sign by-laws in surrounding Towns. Business owners need people to be able to see their signs and there should be a balance between consistency and flexibility. The sign must fit with the architectural design and size of the building.

Member Degen said the Board should look at other towns' by-laws, but he is very concerned about signs for new businesses in the outlying areas of Groton. The Historic Districts Commission does a good job reviewing signs in the Town Center.

Member Wilson said there is overlap in the area with the Planning Board's jurisdiction under Site Plan Review and the Sign Committee's jurisdiction.

Selectman Winn Nordblom suggested that the Board look at both the Sign By-law and the Promotion of Harmonious Development By-law as part of the Design Guidelines process.

Member Perkins said the size and lighting of signs should be regulated, but creative signs are very attractive. The Town should not put too many limitations on creative design.

Member Eliot suggested meeting with the Selectmen, the Sign Committee, the Historic Districts Commission and the Building Inspector.

Member Perkins asked about gateway design issues. Mr. Flinker said there are critical locations in the Town, like the Four Corners, that should be treated carefully because they create a sense of gateways to the community.

Member Perkins said she would like to encourage more landscaping and street trees that form a canopy over public ways. The guidelines should also include examples of good lighting design. She agreed that more visual examples should be incorporated into the document.

Member Wilson agreed that the Board should look at lighting and address light pollution issues. He said the guidelines should be clear and informative to help guide better development.

Member Degen noted that the guidelines are a recommendation and they are not binding. Some features can be incorporated into the Site Plan Review by-law if they are important.

Mr. Flinker said design guidelines are a good tool, but they do not provide all the answers. He agreed that photographs and illustrations are needed. The design standards should be based upon neighborhood meetings with residents. The Board could sponsor a day-long charrette to discuss these issues with area residents.

Member Eliot said she wanted the guidelines to address more than just architectural details. She said landscaping, shade trees, and other amenities should be included. She said the guidelines should be used as a tool to educate the applicant and the public.

Member Degen said now that special permits are required for Level II and III, the Board will have more latitude with design issues.

Member Barringer said that the Board should adopt guidelines rather than regulations to address aesthetic issues and not overwhelm the applicants at this stage. He agreed that it is important to avoid uniformity and allow creative design.

Chairman Clements said treatment of natural areas is also important. He said the guidelines should encourage the use of Low Impact Development for stormwater management systems. Member Clements agreed that the final document should include photographs.

Member Wilson said the illustrations and layout should be prepared with professional guidance.

LETTER TO MRPC

The motion was made to send a letter to the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) to request assistance to identify funding sources for the restoration of Fitch's Bridge as outlined in the application submitted by the Groton Fitch's Bridge Committee and to request assistance in preparing any necessary grant applications for such funds. ***The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.***

MINUTES

The Board voted to approve the minutes of March 30, 2006 and April 6, 2006.

Meeting adjourned at 9:30 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Michelle Collette
Planning Administrator