

**GROTON PLANNING BOARD
FEBRUARY 28, 2008
MINUTES**

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

Members present: Wilson, Capes, Eliot, Giger, Hess, and Perkins

Member absent: Barringer

ACADEMY HILL DRAINAGE ISSUES

The Board received a report dated February 15, 2008 from Nitsch Engineering describing drainage problems at the Academy Hill subdivision. Runoff from Fieldstone Drive has been flowing onto Townsend Road because some catch basins are blocked with snow and others have silt sacks that are clogged. As a result, there have been serious icing problems on the public way, a portion of Townsend Road is being undermined from erosion, and water is flowing onto the abutter's property on the other side of Townsend Road. The developer took measures to correct the matter in the short term by opening the catch basins and placing crushed stone along the side of Townsend Road. The Highway Department has been removing the ice when necessary.

The motion was made by Perkins to send a letter to developer Bruce Wheeler of the Academy Hill Realty Trust requesting that he attend the Planning Board's meeting on March 13, 2008 to present his plans to correct the problem and repair damage to Townsend Road. *The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.*

PRE-SUBMISSION REVIEW – GROTON TRADING COMPANY, 134 MAIN STREET

Business owners Jim Ryan and Kathy Digrazia met with the Board about a proposed café to be installed at the retail store located at 134 Main Street. The Building Inspector recommended that they meet with the Planning Board to determine whether the proposed use is a change of use and whether Site Plan Review is required.

Ms. Digrazia said the 25-seat café will utilize approximately 1000 SF of the main house. They plan to serve soup, salads and sandwiches. The electrical and plumbing work has been completed, but the Building Inspector told them they needed a building permit for a change of use. Mr. Ryan said the café is only about 10% of the property currently used as a retail business. The site is served by Town water and sewer. The connection fee for sewer is based upon the number of seats in the café.

Member Perkins said changing a retail business to a food-service business is a change of use in her opinion.

Member Eliot noted that many years ago, the Board reviewed a site plan for this property when it was owned by the Kilbridges. She suggested that the Board review the number of parking spaces approved at that time. She said the Board approved overflow parking in the field.

Member Capes said the Board could determine that the proposed café is a change of use, but it could waive the requirement to submit a site plan if there is adequate parking at the site.

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Member Perkins asked about the total area of the building. Mr. Ryan said it is 12,113 SF. Member Perkins said 48 parking spaces are required for retail use and 17 spaces are required for the 25-seat restaurant. Mr. Ryan and Ms. Digrazia said some of the retail space is presently used for storage. The Board determined that approximately 50 parking space would be required.

Ms. Digrazia said there are about 40 spaces at the site today with provisions for overflow parking in the field.

Member Giger asked if there are any other proposed endeavors. Mr. Ryan said they have leased 9' x 14' spaces to antique dealers in the past, but no other tenants use the property today. Member Eliot noted that the Kilbridges always had a cooperative of antique dealers.

Member Giger asked if the applicant is planning to lease space. Ms. Digrazia said they have no plans to do so.

Vice Chairman Wilson said the Comprehensive Master Plan promotes and encourages local businesses. The Board must keep the discussion in perspective and stay focused on the proposal.

Member Eliot added that the Board should help small businesses thrive. There is no proposal to change the footprint of the building.

Member Hess said this is a substantial property with multiple buildings on the site. An adjunct business is before the Board for its consideration. He said it makes sense for the Board to be prudent and cautious.

Member Capes reiterated that this is a change of use, and the Board should review the approved site plan and determine whether to waive site plan review requirements. Member Perkins agreed.

Member Hess said the Board must consider the future of the Station Avenue Overlay District and recognize that other property owners may want to participate in this type of business activity. However, the Board must be sure it is doing the right thing.

Ms. Digrazia said this is a unique property with multiple buildings located in the center of Town. She said they want to do what is right for their business and what is right for the Town.

Member Eliot suggested that the Board determine that a Site Plan Review was conducted for this property and that the existing parking meets the needs of the proposed change of use.

Member Hess asked if the Board should review the previous site plan before making the determination.

Member Eliot said the plan was reviewed 10 or 15 years ago. She said the parking requirements have changed since that time so the site should be treated as a grandfathered use. The Board allowed overflow parking in the field to reduce the amount of impervious surface.

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Mr. Ryan said they have had large events, such as the Groton-Dunstable Educational Foundation auction, and people have parked in the field without any problems. He said approximately 800 people attended that event.

The motion was made by Eliot to acknowledge that the Board conducted a site plan review for the property for retail use in the past. The available parking at the site meets the needs of the intended change of use, and the proposed café is a small percentage of the total floor area. In addition, the proposed plan is consistent with the goals and objectives of the comprehensive master plan. The Board will review the previously approved site plan and waive the requirement for site plan review for the café at this time. *The motion was seconded.*

Member Hess and Member Giger said they did not want to vote on the motion without reviewing the previous site plan first. Town Planner Michelle Collette said the plan is in storage and she would bring it to the next meeting. Vice Chairman Wilson suggested that the Board postpone voting on the motion until March 4, 2008. The Board agreed.

FILING FEES

The Board reviewed the filing fees for Groton, Littleton, Pepperell and Westford. The Board will consider increasing the administrative filing fees deposited in the general fund. Members noted that the fees must reasonably reflect the cost of processing applications but should not be used to supplement revenue. Town Planner Michelle Collette will prepare a draft of proposed changes to the filing fees for the Board's review at its March 13, 2008 meeting. The Board must hold a public hearing prior to adopting changes to the filing fees.

PACKETS

The Board of Selectmen suggested distributing packets electronically to members to save postage and paper. The Board members had varying opinions on the matter, but said they would be willing to try the new system as long as there are paper copies at the meeting.

HOUSE NUMBERING

Member Giger reported that he attended the IT Committee meeting to discuss the proposed changes to the house numbering by-law. The IT Committee decided that more review is necessary so it would present the proposed amendment to Town Meeting in the fall.

Meeting adjourned at 9:30 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Michelle Collette
Town Planner