

**PLANNING BOARD
SEPTEMBER 8, 2011
MINUTES**

Chairman Burke called the meeting to order at 7:30 PM.

Members present: Burke, Barringer, Capes, Giger, Parent, and Perkins

Member absent: Wilson

PRE-SUBMISSION REVIEW – GROTON ELECTRIC LIGHT DEPARTMENT

The Board met with Groton Electric Light Department (GELD) Commissioner Kevin Lindemer, GELD Manager Kevin Kelly, and design engineer Susan Carter of Places Associates to discuss GELD's preliminary plans to build a new facility on Station Avenue.

Mr. Lindemer said the GELD Commission would like to work with the Town to locate a new fire station in addition to the GELD operational facilities on GELD's property located at the end of Station Avenue. A cost estimate to construct the new fire station is needed prior to the Selectmen signing the warrant for the October 17, 2011 Fall Town Meeting. He asked the Board to support the plan to construct both facilities on the site, noting that the Conservation Commission supports the plan. He said moving parking spaces closer to Main Street and away from the wetlands would require a waiver from the Planning Board.

Mr. Lindemer said if the Planning Board approves the plan, GELD will be able to provide a cost estimate to the Board of Selectmen. GELD will transfer a portion of its land to the Town for \$199,000. Additional savings may be realized by siting both facilities on the same parcel.

Member Perkins asked if the Conservation Commission agreed to work within the 50 ft buffer zone. She asked if GELD could move its building the fire station is not located on the same site. Mr. Lindemer said GELD would prefer not to move its building. He added that they only spoke with the Conservation Commission about the GELD facility – not the fire station. The Commission asked if they could remove parking outside the 50 ft buffer.

Member Perkins asked how much of the site would be impervious. Ms. Carter said the plan is still changing so they have not done the calculations yet.

Member Perkins asked about snow removal and dumpsters. Ms. Carter said the plan would include landscaped areas, drainage swales and basins to meet Low Impact Development (LID) requirements.

Member Perkins asked why there are 20 parking spaces shown on the plan. Mr. Kelly said the Fire Chief said he wanted 30 spaces. Member Parent asked about the height of the building. Mr. Lindemer said the GELD building would include a one-story office and a two-story garage. The fire station will be a two-story building.

Member Parent asked how many parking spaces would be located within the 50 ft wetlands buffer. Ms. Carter said "may," including the accessible parking spaces unless the Planning Board grants a waiver from the Station Avenue Overlay District requirements.

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Ms. Carter said she is looking for conceptual approval of the plan for GELD and the fire station. She said they are looking for direction for the design at this phase.

Member Capes asked why the Conservation Commission would approve 20 parking spaces in the buffer zone. Mr. Kelly said GELD must work with the Fire Chief and Conservation Commission prior to the Fall Town Meeting. He said they are looking for the Planning Board's blessing in principal at this time.

Member Perkins said she is comfortable talking about the parking lot layout at this time, but very uncomfortable with pre-approving the plan with parking located in the buffer, no drainage design, etc. Ms. Carter said she understands the Board's concern. More detailed information will be submitted with the special permit/site plan review application. She asked the Board if GELD is headed in the right direction.

Member Barringer asked how they calculated the number of parking spaces needed for GELD and the fire station. Mr. Kelly said some parking spaces will be shared by GELD and the fire station and customers will park on the street.

Ms. Carter said parking for customers would be located on Station Avenue, except the universally accessible parking spaces which would be near the front door.

Member Barringer said it is questionable that there will be sufficient parking for customers on Station Avenue. Mr. Kelly said the Fire Chief asked for 30 parking spaces near the fire station. Member Barringer asked if the on-site parking would be for the exclusive use of GELD or the fire station. If not, others may park there. He said if ambulances and fire trucks exit toward the rear of the site, public parking in this location would not be a good idea. Member Barringer said he would like to minimize the number of the parking spaces in the buffer zone. He said if GELD has 14 employees, it needs 14 parking spaces. He asked how the Fire Chief determined he would need thirty spaces.

Member Barringer added that he is concerned about Broadmeadow Road as access since it is not an all-weather road. (Note: Broadmeadow Road is in the 100-year floodplain and floods annually. The road is closed during spring high-groundwater season.)

Member Barringer said this meeting is not a public hearing, so the Board cannot give a firm answer on the conceptual plan. Additional information is needed on stormwater management and other submission requirements.

Member Giger said he does not have a problem moving parking spaces out of the buffer zone or with the garage doors opening toward the rail trail. However, he does not support a plan for the new fire station without hearing from the Fire Chief first. He said the GELD building could be more than one story to reduce the footprint on the lot. GELD talking about finances just confuses the issue at this point. Mr. Lindemer disagreed. The \$199,000 price for the land will save money for both the ratepayers

Chairman Burke observed that the proposed plan is all pavement with an enormous curb cut onto Station Avenue. It looks more like a shopping center parking lot. He agreed that the GELD building should be two stories and asked what the cost per square foot would be. Mr. Kelly said a two-story building would require two stairways and an elevator. The additional cost would be \$1,000,000. Mr. Lindemer stated that a two-story building would not be in the interest of the ratepayers. Chairman

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Burke said a two-story building would result in half the footprint which would be in the interest of the townspeople. The Board is looking for good design which is in the best interest of the community. Mr. Kelly said GELD could rebuild its facilities on the existing footprint.

Chairman Burke said this discussion is a pre-submission review so the Board can give the applicant guidance prior to the formal submission. Mr. Lindemer responded that the GELD Commissioners do not support a two-story office building.

Chairman Burke said he applauds locating the office building close to Station Avenue with the operational facilities in the rear of the site. He asked if all the GELD vehicles would be stored inside. Mr. Lindemer said the vehicles would be inside and all the outdoor storage would be moved to the substation on Route 40.

Chairman Burke asked if the drainage system would be a Low Impact Development (LID) system. Ms. Carter said the roof runoff would be discharged under the pavement. The site has high groundwater issues.

Chairman Burke asked if the site would be gated. Mr. Lindemer said he did not see any reason for a gate. Ms. Carter said signage would be used to restrict access.

Chairman Burke said the plan should show surrounding uses including driveways. He said he is not opposed to moving parking spaces closer to Station Avenue and out of the buffer zone. Member Perkins said she did not have a problem with moving parking spaces as long as it does not interfere with drainage.

Member Giger asked if the Design Review Committee had an opinion. Chairman Burke said the plan has not been submitted to the DRC yet. Mr. Lindemer said GELD is only looking for a provisional approval. Chairman Burke asked if the encroachment of parking in the 50 setback area from the street is a deal breaker, noting that this is not a blessing of the proposed plan.

Member Capes said the Station Avenue guidelines envisioned store fronts on the street which is not an issue with the GELD site. He added that he does have a problem with the 20 parking spaces in the wetlands buffer zone – that is a deal breaker.

Member Giger said the plan is very confusing. He said he would prefer to look at the GELD plan without the fire station.

Mr. Lindemer asked if there are any show stoppers before GELD can move forward with its plan and declare the remainder of the site surplus,

Member Barringer said more land may be required for drainage. He said he would like to see a cost comparison between a one- and two-story building. Traditionally, second stories are less expensive. Chairman Burke said, in summary, the Board members are not opposed to moving parking spaces into the 50 setback from Station Avenue if no alternatives are found. He reminded GELD that this is only an informal poll of the Board.

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PUBLIC HEARING - ACADEMY HILL DEFINITIVE PLAN MODIFICATION

At the request of the applicant, the Board voted unanimously to continue the public hearing on September 22, 2011 at 8 PM. The Board also voted to send the applicant a letter expressing concerns about the delays in the process to review the modification because the work should be completed before winter.

PUBLIC HEARING – CROSSROADS PLAZA SPECIAL PERMIT MODIFICATION

At the request of the applicant, the Board voted unanimously to continue the public hearing on September 22, 2011 at 9 PM. The Board also voted to send the applicant a letter requesting that the plan be withdrawn.

Meeting adjourned at 9:30 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Michelle Collette
Land Use Director/Town Planner