

**PLANNING BOARD
JANUARY 19, 2012
MINUTES**

Member Capes called the meeting to order at 7:30 PM in the Town Hall

Members present: Barringer, Capes, Giger, Parent, and Wilson

Members absent: Burke and Perkins

PUBLIC HEARING – SPECIAL PERMIT, CROTEAU, 66 NORTH STREET

The Board held the continuation of the public hearing to consider the special permit application for Flexible Development submitted by Gerald and Joan Croteau to create seven new units off North Street. The Board voted unanimously to continue the public hearing on January 26, 2012 at 7:30 PM.

PUBLIC HEARING – COMPREHENSIVE MASTER PLAN

In accordance with the provisions of MGL Chapter 41, Section 81D, the Groton Planning Board held a public hearing to consider adopting the “Groton Master Plan, Town of Groton, Massachusetts, Prepared for Groton Planning Board – Land Use Department, Prepared by Community Opportunities Group, Inc., Dodson Associates, Ltd; and Fay, Spofford & Thorndike, Inc.,” dated September 2011.

Member Capes called the public hearing to order. Clerk Parent read the notice published in the December 16 & 23, 2011 and January 6 & 13, 2012 issues of *The Groton Herald*.

Member Capes said the Board worked with its consultants – Community Opportunities Group (COG), Dodson Associates, and Fay, Spofford & Thorndike (FST) on Phase I of the Master Plan. He described the public participation process including over forty volunteers serving on eight Advisory Groups, three well-attended public forums and numerous meetings with Town Departments and residents. The Board calculated that over 1800 volunteer hours were spent on drafting the Master Plan. A Planning Board member and Sustainability Commission member served on each of the Advisory Groups.

Member Capes announced that upcoming Phase II Master Plan Implementation events include a forum on Complete Streets with Gary Hebert of FST on Thursday, February 9, 2012, and a meeting with Judi Barrett of COG to discuss possible zoning amendments on Thursday, February 16, 2012, and a forum on the Town Center Overlay District Design Guidelines with Peter Flinker of Dodson Associates on Saturday, February 18, 2012.

Judi Barrett of COG presented slides depicting the process with the Planning Board and volunteers. She described the interviews with the “stakeholders” and members of the business community. The elements of the Master Plan are defined in MGL Chapter 41, section 81D. Ms. Barrett’s slides presented a summary of the findings for each element: Natural Resources, Cultural Resources and Historic Preservation, Open Space and Recreation, Transportation, Land Use, Housing and Residential Development, Economic Development, and Community Services and Facilities.

Member Capes opened the hearing to comments from the public.

Michael Roberts, Hollis Street, Sustainability Commission Chairman and member of the Historic and Cultural Resources Advisory Group, thanked the Planning Board for including members of the Sustainability Commission in the process. He noted that the archaeological study prepared by the University of Massachusetts is complete and on the Town's web site. The Historical Commission is preparing a resource guide for farmers. He said he looks forward to working with the Board on the Phase II Implementation Plan.

Chris Christie, Townsend Road, member of the Transportation Advisory Group, asked about prioritizing the list of tasks in Phase II.

Bruce Easom, Martins Pond Road, member of the Transportation Advisory Group, expressed concerns about the involvement of members from the Sustainability Commission. He said the process was "tainted" from the beginning. He said he wanted the Master Plan to represent the Townspeople's interests.

Member Wilson responded that the Planning Board reached out to the Sustainability Commission and requested its assistance in the process. The Master Plan was enriched, not undermined, by the Commission's philosophy.

Jenifer Evans of Smith Street said the plan has an underlying core of sustainability, particularly in the housing element that promotes socio-economic diversity. She said as a parent of a child in the schools, she does not want lower-cost housing to impact the schools. It costs about \$7000 to educate each student and taxes do not cover it. Lower cost housing does not pay for the cost of educating students which will result in property taxes being raised. She said students' performance is based upon factors such as school attendance and median family income. People move to Groton for the best schools in the state.

Member Barringer asked Ms. Evans if she was speaking as a private citizen or a member of the Board of Assessors. She replied, "as a private citizen."

Member Barringer explained the requirements of MGL Chapter 40B and the requirement that ten percent (10%) of the Town's housing units must be affordable. Ms. Evans said Chapter 40B is a highly flawed program. She added that sustainability and socio-economic diversity seem to drive the Comprehensive Master Plan. She said the Town of Dunstable is nowhere near meeting the Chapter 40B requirements.

Member Capes asked Ms. Evans if she participated in any of the public forums. She said she did not because she does other volunteer work in town. She stated that she voted with the Finance Committee against hiring a consultant to prepare the plan.

Member Barringer asked for more details on Ms. Evan's objections to the plan. She responded that she did not agree with the housing element, which could be considered "class warfare" on large, single-family homes. She said the underlying goal is to increase population diversity. She expressed concern about the recently approved project at 134 Main Street with condominiums

and apartments as an example. She said there has never been a cul de sac with condominiums in the Town Center.

Bob Pine of Hollis Street said he supports the concept and principles of sustainability. He said he would like to see more diversity and acknowledged that a great deal of effort went into the process. However, he said he believes some of the ideas are good, some are mediocre, and some are poor. He said he supports the Master Plan even though he does not agree with everything in it. It is a starting point and set of ideas to be considered.

Russ Harris of Longley Road said the by-law allows conversion of single family houses to two-family houses by-right. A lot of work has been done over the years. He said some reconsideration is needed. The goals in the Housing and Residential Development element depart from 50 years of planning in this town. He asked the Planning Board why it did not respond to the editorials in the Groton Herald which is the logical forum to debate the plan. He said the general public has serious questions and concerns. It is a mistake for the Planning Board to approve the plan. The Board should reopen the process so the plan reflects the will of the Town.

Fran Stanley, Court Street, member of the Community Services and Facilities Advisory Group, said the sustainability aspect of the plan balances the present and future health of the Town. It is important to consider sustainability in each element. She said it important to keep in mind that Groton is a town within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts which encourages affordable housing. The aspect of sustainability is part of being a healthy community.

Dale Young of Temple Drive expressed concern about the housing element and the relationship to Chapter 40B. Bruce Easom said the 10% requirement can be met by producing 5% of the required units per year if the Town has an approved housing production plan.

Mr. Young said the Town does not want greater density because it will impact the schools. He asked what would happen if the Town Meeting does not ratify the plan. Ms. Barrett responded the Board is now in the implementation phase and stated that any zoning or by-law changes must be approved by Town Meeting.

Member Wilson said this plan is not a radical departure from previous plans – it is an evolutionary process. There are no radical departures from previous plans. Inclusionary zoning was adopted in 1990. Diversity results in a healthier society where there is room for everybody.

Mr. Harris said he respectfully disagreed. The previous Master Plans protected the village areas and did not increase density in the Town Center. The present Master Plan is a radical departure.

Member Wilson said the Town Center was constructed before zoning was adopted and could not be built today. He said it makes sense to add density in areas where it already exists.

Member Barringer reiterated that any zoning changes require a 2/3 vote of Town Meeting.

Mr. Harris said this Master Plan is a divisive document with no weight of law that is making recommendations on funding and zoning matters. He asked why the Board did not respond to the newspaper's editorials. Member Capes said the Board did not have an opportunity to respond as a Board.

Member Giger added that the Board could not send a letter to the editors without meeting in open session and voting to do so. Newspaper editorials represent the opinion of the writer, not necessarily the majority opinion of the Town. There are many different voices in Town.

Member Giger noted that Town Meeting voted for the zoning change at 134 Main Street – that is the way the process works.

Cheryl Drubin, Pleasant Street, expressed concerns about the housing element and the recommendation that concept plan approval be taken away from Town Meeting. Member Giger stated that such a change requires a 2/3 vote of Town Meeting.

Mr. Easom said the process has worked well. COG worked hard to solicit public input. He thanked the Planning Board for its efforts.

Mr. Pine said the majority of the ideas in the Master Plan are consistent with previous plans, but there are some radical changes such as increasing density in the Town Center. This is a very important topic that needs more debate.

Member Capes invited the public to attend the Board's forum with Peter Flinker of Dodson Associates on the Town Center Design Guidelines on Saturday, February 18, 2012.

Ms. Drubin requested that the Board wait until after the Town Center meeting in February before voting on the plan. Town Planner Michelle Collette recommended that the Board continue the public hearing and not vote on adopting the plan until all members are present. The Board agreed.

Ms. Evans asked where the other voices are coming from since there have not been any write ups on the process. Member Capes said the Board held well-publicized and well-attended public forums. The consultant interviewed many stakeholders as well as Town Departments. The 40 Advisory Groups volunteered many hours. The Board did its best to reach out to the public throughout the process.

Ms. Evans said there has not been enough outreach to advertise the contents of the plan. The Board has only heard from people who have a similar mindset.

Member Giger said he spends a considerable amount of time in town talking to a variety of people. Members of the Planning Board are seeking comments from the public.

Ms. Evans asked how the Board communicates with the public. The Board responded that information is posted on the Town's website, advertised in the newspapers, and flyers have been sent home with school children. The Board has made presentations at Town Meetings. The press has published numerous stories on Master Plan meetings and events. Forums have been broadcast on Cable TV.

Carol Quinn, Ridgewood Avenue, of the Community Services and Facilities Group, said she enjoyed working on the Advisory Group. She agreed with the recommendation on diversity, planning for affordable housing, and that sustainability should be included in every element. She noted that people could use the website to send comments on the draft master plan. *(Note: The "comments form" on the web site was made available in April 2011 and is still functional.)*

The Board voted unanimously to continue the public hearing on March 1, 2012 at 7:30 PM.

Meeting adjourned at 9:45 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Michelle Collette
Land Use Director/Town Planner