

TOWN OF GROTON PLANNING BOARD

Thursday, January 14, 2021

Meeting Minutes

A virtual meeting of the Planning Board was held on Thursday, January 14, 2021, at approximately 7:02 p.m.

The meeting was broadcasted via Zoom and was available to view on the Groton Channel pursuant to the Governor's Executive Order Concerning the Open Meeting Law.

Members Present:

Mr. Russell Burke, Chair
Mr. George Barringer, Board Member
Ms. Annika Nilsson Ripps, Clerk
Ms. Lorayne Black, Board Member
Mr. David Bonnett, Board Member
Mr. Scott Wilson, Board Member

Members not Present:

Mr. Timothy M. Svarczkopf, Vice Chair

Also Present:

Mr. Takashi Tada, Land Use Director/Town Planner

Public Hearing (Continued) – Definitive Plan & Special Permit – Major Residential Development Proposed “Village at Shepley Hill” Longley Road & Sand Hill Road Shepley Hill Capital Partners, LLC (Assessors’ Parcel 226-2)

Mr. Larry Smith, Managing Director, Restoration Capital, said they had listened to the advice of the Planning Board members and the biggest proposed change they wanted to make was to minimize the cuts.

Attorney Jill Mann, Legal Counsel for Shepley Hill Capital Partners, reviewed the proposed changes to the plan which included a cut sheet that confirmed the lighting was Dark Sky compliant. She added they would have to request a waiver from the strict adherence to the vertical curve stopping distance in the Planning Board Regulations, in order to reduce the cuts.

Mr. Charlie Wear, Design Engineer, Meridian Associates, displayed the potential revisions to the road profiles, which assume the granting of a waiver from the vertical curve stopping distance regulations. Mr. Wear explained that the regulations require a stopping distance of 175 feet on a minor road with a speed limit of 35 mph. With the granting of the waiver, and the proposed lower speed limit of 25 mph, Mr. Wear said a sight distance of 155 feet provides adequate safety. The waiver would be needed in three locations along the proposed interior roadways.

Attorney Mann said Nitsch Engineering reviewed the request for the additional waiver and concluded that it did not impact safety and complied with AASHTO (American Association of State Highway and Transportation Official) requirements.

Mr. Jared Gentilucci, Civil Engineer, Nitsch Engineering, addressed the Board and stated he had reviewed the latest plans and confirmed he had no issues with the proposed changes or the request for a waiver.

Mr. Bonnett commented that he would like to see an isopach map that showed the cuts and fills. An isopach is a contour map showing the areas of proposed negative (cut) or positive (fill) changes to the existing elevation contours. He also asked about historic crash data at the intersection of Longley and Sand Hill Roads.

Mr. Andrew Arseneault, Transportation Engineer, Vanasse & Associates, said there were two crash records in the MassDOT database and zero records in the Groton Police database.

Mr. Burke read aloud a Zoom Chat comment from Mr. Chris Braun, an abutter, as summarized below:

As residents who travel along Longley Road and the Sand Hill Road area frequently can attest to the fact that there are probably numerous near misses in terms of accidents.

Mr. Wilson commented his main area of concern was the grading even after the proposed reductions. He said he felt it still exceeded the limitations that were envisioned when the regulation was put into place, specifically to protect land such as the subject site in part because it contained wetlands and delicate ecosystems. He added he did not see the imperative that outweighed the importance of preserving the ecosystem of the land.

Mr. Smith reiterated the benefits of the project to the Town which include permanent protection of the open space surrounding the development and a public trail, substantial tax revenue, extension of the water line up Longley Road, and a donation of \$150,000 to the Affordable Housing Trust.

Mr. Burke read aloud a Zoom Chat comment from Mr. Paul Riley, an abutter, as summarized below:

I called an accident at Sand Hill and Longley into the Groton Police Department a few years back. I've also run over to the intersection of Nashua and Longley to confirm non-injury accidents twice.

Mr. Burke asked if there were any other members of the public who had questions or comments.

Ms. Anna Eliot, an abutter, commented if the construction moved forward it would be a major disturbance to the land. She added, however, that she felt the end result was far better than any other types of development that could be constructed on the site. Ms. Eliot suggested that the Town buy the land if it was felt it was a precious ecological site.

Mr. Bob Pine, a resident, commented that he felt the waiver for the vertical curve seemed to be quite reasonable, however, he added he felt the amount of cut and fill that remained was still extraordinary. He said the regulations are designed to respect and protect the unique topography of this site. He also suggested a requirement to have the proposed steep slopes certified by a Geotechnical Engineer.

Mr. Brad Bobzien, an abutter, addressed the Board and stated his father-in-law, Mr. Hugh McGovern was the owner of the subject property. Mr. Bobzien said he had no financial interest in the development, but he was in favor of the proposal. He said Mr. Smith has a track record of quality developments, and the applicants have been very receptive to the neighbors' concerns. He also said he likes the age restriction, low density, landscaping, public trails, and water line extension associated with this proposal.

Mr. Tada stated he received the following communications regarding the proposed development:

Prior to the first public hearing held on December 27, 2020

- Initial peer review comments from Nitsch Engineering
- Communication from Bob Pine relative to concerns with the extent of cuts and fills.
- Communication from the Board of Health regarding the potential of contaminated fill being brought to the site, what the purpose of the well was for, Title V regulations, soil testing data, and requested septic system plans.
- Copy of a letter to the editor which was submitted to the local newspapers by Bob Pine.
- Letter from the Groton Conservation Trust addressed to the Conservation Commission relative to the wetland crossings.

January 14, 2021

- Comment on the most recent revised plans and materials that were submitted within the past few days.

Mr. Burke summarized the general consensus of the Planning Board members. They are more concerned about the cuts/fills, and less concerned about the vertical curve sight distances.

Ms. Nilsson Ripps commented the Planning Board did not have any control as to whether or not property owners developed their land. She said she felt there were benefits to the proposed development but she also said she had some of the same concerns voiced by other Board members such as the amount of cut and fill as well as the traffic issues.

Mr. Burke commented he felt the team was very responsive to the Planning Boards' requests and concerns.

Mr. Burke commented that he would like to make sure the developer had looked at every other possibility to cross the wetland before he made a decision. Attorney Mann replied they would be looking at additional alternatives.

Mr. Wilson also commented that while he had an open mind regarding the proposed development and recommended that the developer move forward with the revisions, he was not ready to make a decision.

Ms. Black raised a question about whether the project would need a waiver from the regulation in Ch. 381-13.B, relative to grass plots and slopes adjacent to the proposed roadways. The applicants agreed to take another look at this.

Mr. Burke stated that although they would not vote on the waiver at this meeting, the Planning Board was comfortable with the vertical curves and the sight distance aspect but wanted to continue the evaluation of the final plan in terms of cuts and fills. Attorney Mann replied the developer could not make further cuts without the waiver. Mr. Barringer pointed out that the Planning Board did not address requests for waivers until the end of the process.

Mr. Barringer suggested all of the outdoor lighting be taken out with the exception of the intersections and the entranceways unless there was another location that needed lighting for safety reasons.

Mr. Barringer made a motion to continue the public hearing to a date specific of January 28, 2021, at 7:30 p.m. Mr. Wilson seconded the motion.

A Roll Call Vote was taken, which resulted as follows:

Yea: Ms. Black, Ms. Nilsson Ripps, Mr. Bonnett, 6
Mr. Wilson, Mr. Barringer, and Mr. Burke

Nay: 0

VOTE: 6 – 0 – 0

MOTION CARRIED

***Discussion – Letter of Support for Proposed Marion Stoddart Riverwalk Project
(Groton Trails Committee)***

Mr. Paul Funch, Chairman of the Groton Trails Committee, addressed the Board and said he is seeking a letter of support for the Recreational Trails Grant that he is submitting to the state (DCR MassTrails Program) for funding of the design phase for the Marion Stoddart Riverwalk project. The proposed project would include an accessible trail that is ADA compliant along the Nashua River from Route 225 (Long Hill Road) up to Hazel Grove Park. He said it would be approximately one mile and would have a stone dust type of surface so wheelchairs and strollers would have access to it. He also said there would be an equestrian trail for horses.

Mr. Funch stated that the land would be purchased by a local benefactor and donated to the Groton Conservation Commission.

Mr. Barringer made a motion to write a letter of support regarding the trail grant. Mr. Wilson seconded the motion.

A Roll Call Vote was taken, which resulted as follows:

Yea: Ms. Black, Ms. Nilsson Ripps, Mr. Bonnett, 6
Mr. Wilson, Mr. Barringer, and Mr. Burke

Nay: 0

VOTE: 6 – 0 – 0

MOTION CARRIED

***Discussion – Review Status of Compliance with Major Site Plan Review Requirements
Music Center at Indian Hill, 122 Old Ayer Road***

Mr. Burke requested Mr. Tada to do an audit of the conditions regarding the Music Center and then perhaps provide a more formal invitation for a representative to attend a future meeting.

Project Updates

- Village Meadows, 372 Townsend Road

Mr. Tada explained that Mr. Kanniard, the developer had been working on the drainage infrastructure and had been in regular contact with the Town and Nitsch Engineering to coordinate the required inspections.

Committee Updates

- Complete Streets Committee

There were no updates.

- Community Preservation Committee

Mr. Tada commented that the deadline for the complete draft applications was January 14, 2021, and the next major deadline would be for the final application which was due the third week of February.

General Business

Approval of Meeting Minutes

- November 19, 2020

Mr. Barringer made a motion to approve the minutes from the November 19, 2020, meeting as amended. Mr. Wilson seconded the motion.

Edit - Page 1 – Ms. Black was marked as “present” rather than “not present.”

A Roll Call Vote was taken, which resulted as follows:

Yea:	Ms. Black, Ms. Nilsson Ripps, Mr. Bonnett, Mr. Wilson, Mr. Barringer, and Mr. Burke	6
Nay:		0

VOTE: 6 – 0 – 0
MOTION CARRIED

- December 3, 2020

Mr. Barringer made a motion to approve the minutes from the December 3, 2020, meeting as presented. Ms. Black seconded the motion.

A Roll Call Vote was taken, which resulted as follows:

Yea:	Ms. Black, Ms. Nilsson Ripps, Mr. Bonnett, Mr. Wilson, Mr. Barringer, and Mr. Burke	6
Nay:		0

VOTE: 6 – 0 – 0

MOTION CARRIED

Planning Board Meeting Schedule

- January 28, 2021
- February 11, 2021
- February 25, 2021

Adjournment

Mr. Wilson made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Nilsson Ripps seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken and the meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Trish Gedziun
Recording Secretary