**TOWN OF GROTON PLANNING BOARD**

**Thursday, July 13, 2023**

**Meeting Minutes**

A virtual meeting of the Planning Board was held on Thursday, July 13, 2023, at approximately

7:00 p.m.

**Members Present:**

Mr. Scott Wilson, Chair

Mr. George Barringer, Board Member

Ms. Alyson Bedard, Clerk

Mr. Russell Burke, Board Member

Mr. David Bonnett, Board Member

Mr. Phil Francisco, Board Member

**Not Present:**

Ms. Lorayne Black, Board Member (Excused)

**Also Present:**

Mr. Takashi Tada, Land Use Director/Town Planner

Per the Massachusetts Attorney General’s guidance regarding the Massachusetts Wiretap Statute and the Open Meeting Law, Mr. Wilson stated the meeting was virtual and recorded, and all votes must be taken via roll call. Mr. Wilson also introduced the Planning Board members in attendance.

***Public Hearing (Continuation) – Preliminary Subdivision Plan***

***63 Gratuity Road, Assessor’s Parcel 216-47***

***Routhier & Roper Gratuity Road LLC.***

* Received traffic peer review comments from Nitsch Engineering
* Received a response to traffic peer review comments and revised traffic study from Vanasse & Associates
* Received comments from Paula Martin
* Received comments from the Park Commission

Attorney Melissa Robbins, Farrell & Robbins, P.C. addressed the Board on behalf of the applicant. She said they received the Yield Plan review letter from Nitsch Engineering. They agree that the Yield Plan number of 14 lots represents the basic maximum number of units for the Flexible Development Plan. They noted that the Flexible Development unit count on the preliminary plan submitted to the Board was improper and they would have to make some revisions on both the Yield Plan and the Flexible Development Plan.

Attorney Robbins said they also received some comments from the Conservation Commission which the applicant’s wetlands consultant responded to.

Attorney Robbins also said they received a few more comments from abutters and those who abutted Hazel Grove Park.

Attorney Robbins said they received the review of the traffic report from Nitsch Engineering and in general, they agreed with the study, but that they had some technical questions from Vanasse & Associates noting that they thoroughly responded to all of the comments raised in the letter. She noted the only missing item was that the Board had asked Nitsch Engineering for potential improvements to be considered as part of the Definitive Subdivision Plan and they did not have that yet.

Mr. Daniel LaCivita, Transportation Engineer, Vanasse & Associates, Inc. addressed the Board and reviewed the Traffic Engineering Peer Review letter as summarized below:

**Comment 1:** In Table 1, it would be helpful to indicate which approach(es) at each intersection are stop-controlled and to note somewhere that these are all 1- or 2-way stop-controlled intersections, as opposed to all-way stop-controlled.

**Response:** Table 1 of the June 2023 TIA has been updated accordingly.

**Comment 2:** For the seasonal adjustment, technically, the traffic volumes for the month of May are 13.6% above average-month conditions because it is the inverse of the 0.88 factor that provides that information. Alternatively, it could also be correctly stated as “traffic volumes for average-month conditions are 12.0% below traffic volumes for the month of May.”

**Response:** Comment noted; the June 2023 TIA has been updated accordingly.

**Comment 3:** The traffic volumes discussion states, “the 2019 traffic volumes were considered to be representative of existing (2023) traffic volumes,” but it is not clear whether the 2019 or 2023 traffic counts were used for the one ATR location and one TMC location where both 2019 and 2023 counts were taken. The volumes in Table 2 and Figures 2 and 3 appear to be consistent with the 2019 data for those locations, which should be clarified in the narrative.

**Response:** The 2019 traffic volume data was used since it was found to be higher than the 2023 traffic count data. June 2023 TIA has been updated accordingly.

**Comment 4:** The existing AM volumes for the northbound and southbound through movements on Mill Street at the intersection with Main Street do not match the 2019 TMCs in the appendix and need to be reviewed for correctness. It appears that these numbers were carried through to the No-Build and Build volumes, so those volumes would need to be corrected as well. The Synchro analysis also would need these corrections.

**Response:** VAI has reviewed and verified that the 2023 Existing weekday morning peak-hour volumes at the Main Street/Mill Street intersection are correct as presented. No revisions to the June 2023 TIA are required.

**Comment 5:** The TMCs included pedestrian and bicycle counts, but those counts are not mentioned in the body of the TIA. According to the counts in the appendix, the number of pedestrians and bicycles recorded was low. We would like the TIA to include a mention of the magnitude of pedestrian and bicycle activity at the study intersections under existing conditions.

**Response:** The June 2023 TIA has been updated to include a discussion on pedestrian and bicycle volumes within the study area.

**Comment 6:** In Table 3 and the discussion that follows in the speed evaluation, the mean travel speed is used. Typical practice most often uses 50th percentile (median) speed rather than mean speed, though we note that the speed data in the appendix indicates that the mean and median speeds are the same, to the nearest integer mile-per-hour, in all cases in the 2019 data and for westbound Gratuity Road in the 2023 data, and they differ only slightly for eastbound Gratuity Road in the 2023 data.

**Response:** Table 3 of the June 2023 TIA has been revised to present both the mean and the 50th percentile (median) speeds.

**Comment 7:** The memorandum states that motor vehicle crash information for the study area intersections was provided by the MassDOT Highway Division Safety Management/Traffic Operations Unit. It should be clarified whether the information obtained was the full crash report for each incident, or whether the data was obtained using MassDOT’s IMPACT Crash Portal, which does not include the sketch and narrative for each crash that is otherwise found in the full crash report. Either method is acceptable, but the type of data used for the safety analysis is important information, as it indicates whether the engineer was able to verify key pieces of coded information from the crash portal, particularly the manner of collision.

**Response:** The motor vehicle crash data was obtained from MassDOT’s IMPACT Crash Portal. The narrative in the June 2023 TIA has been updated to reflect this clarification.

**Comment 8:** In the crash rate worksheets in the appendix, a K-factor of 0.090 is used at all intersections. However, the ATRs indicate a K-factor ranging from 0.093 to 0.097. A higher K-factor consistent with the ATRs would result in a slightly higher crash rate, which would be the more conservative analysis. Either a higher K-factor should be applied to the crash rate worksheets, or justification for the lower K-factor should be provided.

**Response:** The motor vehicle crash rate calculations have been revised to use the measured weekday evening peak-hour K-factor (0.097) and Table 4 of the June 2023 TIA and the MassDOT Crash Rate Worksheets have been revised accordingly.

**Comment 9:** There is a typographic error in Table 4 for the District Crash Rate at the intersection of Main Street and Mill Street – it says 61 instead of 0.61, and it should be corrected.

**Response:** The District 3 Crash Rate for the Mian Street/Mill Street intersection reported in Table 4 of the June 2023 TIA has been corrected.

**Comment 10:** The data from the permanent count stations provided in the appendix indicate that recent years up to and including 2019 were used for the background traffic growth determination. Stopping at 2019 data avoids using data from the years of the COVID pandemic (starting in 2020), and we agree with the years chosen for that reason. The discussion of background traffic growth should note that the data used was only through 2019 to leave no question in the mind of the reader whether pandemic years were included.

**Response:** The narrative of the June 2023 TIA has been updated accordingly.

**Comment 11:** Footnotes 7 and 10 are cited incorrectly and may cause confusion. “Ibid” is used only when the citations to a particular reference are consecutive. Both these footnotes are meant to reference ITE Trip Generation, which was cited in footnote 1. The proper way to cite a repeated reference when the footnotes are not consecutive is to use a secondary citation for the repeating instances. For example, footnotes 7 and 10 could be written as “Institute of Transportation Engineers, 1.”

**Response:** The subject footnotes have been corrected.

**Comment 12:** For the trip generation numbers in Table 5, it should be specified whether average rates or fitted curves were used. The numbers provided indicate that fitted curves were used, though in this case, average rates would have produced higher numbers overall, which would provide a more conservative analysis. The engineer should provide justification for using the less conservative option, or else the average rates should be used in this case. Furthermore, the weekday numbers do not add correctly for the two land uses if using fitted curves; the results provided in the appendix indicate one fewer trip for each of the entry and exit directions. Also, we recommend providing the information separately for the two land uses in addition to providing the combined numbers as shown.

**Response:** The fitted curve equations were used in accordance with the ITE trip-generation methodology which specifies that the fitted curve equation should be used when available and if there are more than 20 data points, which is the case for both ITE Land Use Codes that were used to develop the trip estimates for the Project. No revisions to the June 2023 TIA are required.

**Comment 13:** In the traffic operations analysis, peak-hour factors (PHFs) and heavy-vehicle percentages (%HV) are not mentioned. The discussion should state where the PHFs and %HV used in the analysis came from (were they derived from the 2019 TMCs?), and it should be noted if they were applied by approach or by movement, and whether the factors were kept the same from Existing to No-Build to Build scenarios.

**Response:** The peak-hour factors (PHFs) and heavy vehicle percentages (%HV) were obtained from the 2019 TMCs for each approach and were held consistent for Existing, No-Build and Build scenarios. The narrative of the June 2023 TIA has been updated accordingly.

**Comment 14:** In Table 6, we suggest that the intersection approaches at these unsignalized intersections be adjusted to show only the critical movements, which are the minor-street approaches and the left-turn movements from the major street for one- or two-way stop-control intersections. Accordingly, all the rows for major-street approaches currently shown with only TH/RT movements would be removed, as they contain no critical movements – they all have 0.0s delays, LOS A, and 0 queues. Also, the major street approaches with left-turn movements would be labeled with just “LT” for the left turn, the “TH” and/or “RT” would be deleted, and the data would be updated to reflect the bottom section (“Minor Lane/Major Mvmt”) of the Synchro HCM 6th TWSC (two-way stop-control) reports.

If these changes are made, consider rephrasing the final sentence of item 3 in the summary on the first page and in the conclusions on page 18.

**Response:** Table 6 of the June 2023 TIA has been revised as requested.

**Comment 15:** Also in Table 6, we would like to see the volume-to-capacity (v/c) ratios, in addition to the delays, LOSs, and queue lengths. The v/c ratio is an important measure of congestion that is not fully captured in the delay/LOS for a movement. We understand that v/c ratios are provided in the Synchro HCM 6th TWSC reports for only the critical movements, making it difficult to provide for each approach as the table is currently organized, which is another reason we suggest adjusting the table to show only the critical movements.

**Response:** Table 6 of the June 2023 TIA has been revised as requested.

**Comment 16:** For the queue lengths in Table 6, we observed that some 0.3 and 0.4 values were rounded up to one, which does not follow standard methods for rounding. Nevertheless, since many of these queue lengths are only a fraction of one vehicle, we suggest listing the queue lengths by tenths of vehicles, as provided in the Synchro output report, or converting the decimal number of vehicles to integer feet using 25 feet per vehicle. That way, an increase by one-tenth of a vehicle length does not appear to be an increase by a full vehicle length, as currently happens at least once within the table. If this change is made, item 2 in the summary and conclusions would need to be updated.

**Response:** Table 6 of the June 2023 TIA has been revised as requested and the dependent narrative has also been updated.

**Comment 17:** If Transportation Demand Management (TDM) measures are required for this project, the TIA needs to include a section covering the proposed measures.

**Response:** As detailed in the June 2023 TIA, the Project site and the study area are not served by regularly scheduled public transportation services, and the residential units are comprised of single-family homes and attached duplex units. To the extent that there is a homeowner’s association, the association will make available to new residents information on available public transportation options in the area.

Chair Wilson asked if there were members of the Select Board who had questions or comments.

Mr. Bonnett, referring to the traffic study, stated that there was an abutting property where equestrian events would take place and asked if that was factored into the trip generation. Mr. LaCivita replied it was not. The study only looks at impacts from the proposed project. Mr. Bonnett asked when the trip generation showed a failure (at the intersection of Main Street and Mill Street) if it was incoming or outgoing traffic. Mr. LaCivita replied that the failure, in this particular case, was the Mill Street westbound approach. The wait times for making a left turn onto Main Street are long enough to earn an “F” level of service in Table 6 of the study.

Mr. Bonnett asked Mr. LaCivita how the events at the abutting equestrian facility would impact the traffic. Mr. LaCivita replied that he would have to do a traffic study during an event to get a numerical assessment.

Mr. Bonnett said the proposed 22’ wide road would spill onto an 18’ road, and asked if that would create safety issues. Mr. LaCivita replied that he did not foresee any flow issues.

Mr. Barringer commented that in light of the input from the neighborhood regarding the two intersections, he felt the Planning Board should request that the Select Board install 3-way and 4-way stop controls at the Jenkins Road (3-way) and at the Mill Street/Gratuity Road(4-way).

Mr. Wilson stated that the Planning Board had received two pieces of correspondence, one from Ms. Paula Martin, an abutter, and the other from the Park Commissioners.

Ms. Paula Martin, 88 Jenkins Road, read aloud a prepared statement as summarized below:

“I believe that one of the topics relative to this project being discussed will be the traffic reports. While I understand that traffic studies take into account current conditions, I want to be sure that the Board has an awareness of the extensive development being proposed for 500 Main Street as it was located directly across from Mill Street, the highly traversed area of concern adjoining Gratuity and Jenkins Road. This intersection previously received much discussion and study when the development of Mill Run Business Complex & Condominiums was proposed and developed. Traffic has only increased and to acknowledge that Mill Street is a cut-through route to avoid the ever-growing number of other state vehicles and congestion on Main Street is an understatement.

It would be my hope that efforts to acknowledge and safely minimize the current and growing traffic situation, as well as the future magnitude of these predictable traffic challenges will be given priority discussion and consideration. Gratuity and Jenkins Roads are older, very narrow, and unimproved residential country roads. The potential volume and type of traffic being considered have the potential to become unsafe, even dangerous for the residents, many of whom are young children.

I realize that Groton is a desirable, and growing primarily residential town, but at the same time, it is incumbent upon those who make a variety of decisions to be aware of all of the facts, whenever possible, and to make the best decisions, whenever possible with the input of those most directly affected and with the safety of all foremost in their minds.”

Ms. Bedard read aloud a letter received from the Park Commission, dated July 7, 2023, as follows:

“The Park Commission owns the Hazel Grove equestrian property abutting the development at 63 Gratuity Road. The racetrack is used daily for driving horses, and training. The Park Commission voted at our July 11, 2023, meeting to request a condition in perpetuity that the developer construct a 4-foot chain-link fence along the entire property line from Jenkins Road to the farthest northwest property line. Another condition is sought that the condominium association is responsible to ensure that the fence remains to prevent unintended access to the track and to maintain it in perpetuity. There are ways to construct a fence that allows wildlife to traverse the property. Please place these conditions on the conservation restriction being proposed by the developer and please read this letter into the record.”

Mr. Francisco asked if both the 2030 no-build and 2030 build traffic estimates that were done included the traffic analysis additions that were part of the 500 Main Street 40B proposed project. Mr. LaCivita replied in the affirmative and said the 2030 estimates also include Hayes Woods and the Village at Shepley Hill.

Mr. Francisco stated that he felt the left turns on the northbound Main Street onto Arlington Street were very worrisome.

Mr. Matthew Waterman, LandTech Consultants (applicant’s engineer) clarified that the proposed roads would be 24’ wide with a sidewalk with a grass strip. With respect to the existing roads providing access to the subject parcel, he said Jenkins Road was 22’ wide and Gratuity Road was 18’ wide. He added that the roads were both “improved” roads and not “unimproved” roads.

Mr. Wilson asked if any members of the public wished to comment or had questions. There were none.

**MOTION:** Mr. Barringer made a motion to continue the public hearing, date specific to the July 27, 2023, meeting. Mr. Francisco seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken; which resulted as follows:

Yea: Mr. Barringer, Mr. Francisco, Ms. Bedard, 5

Mr. Bonnett, and Mr. Wilson

Nay: 0

**MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.**

**MOTION:** Mr. Barringer made a motion to request that Mr. Tada draft a letter to the Select Board to investigate and potentially increase the number of traffic controls at the two intersections on Mill Street for safety and to reduce speed. Mr. Francisco seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken; which resulted as follows:

Yea: Mr. Barringer, Mr. Francisco, Ms. Bedard, 5

Mr. Bonnett, and Mr. Wilson

Nay: 0

**MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.**

***Discussion – Master Plan Update – Barrett Planning Group***

* Consultants are scheduling interviews with stakeholders.

***Reorganization & Appointments***

To be addressed when there was a full complement from the Board in attendance.

***Project Updates***

* **Academy Hill**
  + Working to finish the road repairs in order to make it onto the Fall Town Meeting’s Warrant.
* **Monarch Path**
  + The developer said the roadways were complete and had filed an “as-built” plan and Nitsch Engineering was reviewing it.
* **Village at Shepley Hill**
  + Erosion issues due to excessive rain. Working to stabilize it.

***Committee Updates***

* Complete Streets Committee
  + Mr. Tada explained that the latest construction cost estimates for the two sidewalk projects that the town was approved for had come in about 23% higher than what they were awarded the grant for and as it currently stood, they would not be able to complete both projects as designed with the Complete Streets grant money which had been awarded. He added that Mr. Tom Delaney, DPW Director, was looking into some potential cost savings, but the committee had submitted a request to MassDOT to extend the deadline (1 year) for completion due to an increase in construction costs.
* Community Preservation Committee
  + Mr. Tada explained that the committee held its kick-off meeting for FY 24 projects that were approved at the Spring Town Meeting.

***General Business***

* Fall Town Meeting Date
  + Saturday, October 28, 2023
* ZBA Updates
  + Next hearing date for both Groton Farms and Heritage Landing: 7/26/23
* Meeting Minutes – May 25, 2023

**MOTION:** Mr. Burke made a motion to approve the minutes of the May 25, 2023, meeting, as amended. Mr. Bonnett seconded the motion.

Discussion/Edits

Mr. Barringer was added to the two affirmative votes relative to the Village at Shepley Hill.

A roll call vote was taken; which resulted as follows:

Yea: Mr. Barringer, Ms. Bedard, 4

Mr. Bonnett, and Mr. Wilson

Nay: 0

**MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 1. (Abstained – Mr. Francisco)**

***Planning Board Meeting Schedule***

* July 27th
* August 24th
* September 14th
* September 28th
* October 12th
* October 26th
* October 28th – Fall Town Meeting

***Adjournment***

At approximately 8:30 p.m. Ms. Bedard made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Barringer seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken; which resulted as follows:

Yea: Mr. Barringer, Mr. Francisco, Ms. Bedard, 5

Mr. Bonnett, and Mr. Wilson

Nay: 0

**MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.**

Respectfully submitted:

Trish Gedziun

Recording Secretary

*Approved 9/14/2023*