### **TOWN OF GROTON PLANNING BOARD**

### **Thursday, January 25, 2024 at 7:00 PM**

**Meeting Minutes**

A virtual meeting of the Planning Board was held on Thursday, January 25, 2024, at 7:00PM.

**Members Present:**

Mr. Scott Wilson, Chair

Mr. George Barringer, Board Member (exited the meeting 7:40)

Ms. Lorayne Black, Vice Chair

Mr. David Bonnett, Board Member

Ms. Alyson Bedard, Board Member

Mr. Phil Francisco, Clerk

Mr. Russell Burke, Board Member

**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 that the meeting was virtual and recorded, and all votes must be taken via roll call. Further, the people who were participating in the meeting introduced themselves.

***Public Hearing (cont’d) – Special Permit, Town Center Overlay District, 25 Station Avenue (Rob Saunders, CJS Workshop)***

Representative: Don Black

Mr. Tada informed the Board that Tobias Wolf would not be reappointed to the Design Review Committee, indicating the need to seek additional members for the committee.

The memorandum received from the Design Review Committee was presented for the Planning Board's review. It outlined discussions with the applicant regarding potential alterations and improvements, including:

1. Collaborating with the Town to reestablish public access between Station Avenue and Broadmeadow Road, potentially transferring a portion of the property to the Town.
2. Considering exterior building renovations, such as applying exterior siding, constructing a new gable roof, and maintaining existing lighting.
3. Exploring potential site improvements

The Design Review Committee made recommendations for the Planning Board’s consideration. These recommendations encompassed modifications to the structure, site, parking area, landscaping, and stormwater management. Prior to any alterations the modification should undergo a thorough review.

Mr. Tada agreed with the recommendations put forth by the Design Review Committee. He conveyed his belief that the reuse of the property and the re-establishment of the roadway would bring significant benefits to both the Town and the neighborhood.

Ms. Black informed the Board that the recommendations provided by the Review Committee had been discussed with Mr. Saunders.

Mr. Wilson inquired about the exterior design of the building. Mr. Tada said that Mr. Saunders had provided a mock-up of the potential building appearance. The designs were presented for the Board's review, with a focus on the architectural facade. Once the waiver is obtained and there is sufficient income generated, there are plans to proceed with a comprehensive design plan.

Mr. Wilson inquired about the timeline for the building's occupancy. Mr. Black responded that as soon as the special permit is secured, immediate steps would be taken to utilize the space.

Mr. Francisco raised the question of whether there are any crucial elements missing before proceeding with the special permitting. Mr. Black shared his vision of unifying and enclosing the building to enhance its overall attractiveness. The plan is to return for approval when the physical alterations are ready. Mr. Tada highlighted the ongoing collaboration with the Town regarding the condition of the roadway between the building and the rail trail and once that is resolved Mr. Saunders has every intention to invest in site planning.

Mr. Bonnett highlighted the importance of addressing the runoff water management.

Public Q & A

Mr. John Sopka recommended that the architectural design of the building be compatible with the surrounding structures in the neighborhood, avoiding a simplistic, elongated warehouse appearance.

Mr. Burke proposed a condition in the motion, stipulating that the applicant must obtain approval prior to proceeding with any enhancements to the structure, site, landscape, parking, layout, and stormwater management.

***MOTION:*** Ms. Black made a motion to close the public hearing. Mr. Barringer seconded the motion.

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

Yea: Ms. Black, Mr. Francisco, Ms. Bedard 7 Mr. Burke Mr. Bonnett, Mr. Barringer, and Mr. Wilson

Nay: 0

**MOTION CARRIED: 7-0-0**

***MOTION:*** Mr. Burke moved to approve the special permit for the property located at 25 Station Ave for the reuse of the structure as a storage and shipping facility under the conditions that the specific improvements for the building, site, landscaping, parking & layout, and stormwater, is presented to the Planning Board for approval without needing to reopen the special permit. Mr. Barringer seconded the motion.

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

Yea: Mr. Barringer, Mr. Bonnet, Mr. Burke 7 Ms. Bedard, Mr. Francisco, Ms. Black, and Mr. Wilson

Nay: 0

**MOTION CARRIED: 7-0-0**

***Discussion – Master Plan Update***

Representative: Lauren Lind, Barrett Planning Group

Ms. Lind provided an update on the Master Plan, highlighting that the current progress stands at approximately 50%.

Ms. Lind said the Town can expect to receive the Draft Inventory and Assessment to review in the following week. She offered a brief overview of the demographic profile of Groton, noting its moderate and steadily growing population, particularly those in the age groups of 18-24 and 65 and older. The median income is reported to be at $169,000. In terms of land use, 34% consists of single-family residences, while 25% is designated as conservation land. Groton boasts natural resources and open spaces, featuring unique glacial features and serving as a core habitat for plants and animals.

Ms. Lind said that the transportation network spans 113.5 miles of roadway, with Main Street (Route 119) handling most of the vehicular traffic. Despite a gradual increase, the traffic levels have not exceeded those of 2019 prior to the pandemic. Safety crash clusters were noted especially at the intersection of Broadmeadow Road and Main Street. Ms. Lind said that there are challenges in the transportation infrastructure including limited sidewalks and no biking lanes beyond the rail trail.

In terms of housing characteristics, 86% of housing units are single-family homes with a median sales price of $762,000. The subsidized housing inventory (SHI) stands at 5.3% for affordable housing. Economic development in Groton faces challenges due to worker shortages amid an aging workforce, posing potential threats to fiscal sustainability. However, Groton has the potential to expand its retail sector, with favorable commercial tax rates compared to surrounding towns.

Mr. Francisco questioned if there was a time-based analysis performed on the chart representing the housing affordability for individuals in lower income brackets. Ms. Lind acknowledged the question and committed to further looking into the matter. Regarding the affordable housing percentage of 5.3%, it had been calculated prior to the approval of the Groton Farms 40B development.

Mr. Tada inquired about the process that the Planning Board would follow in updating the Draft Inventory and Assessment to reflect recent developments and acquisition of conservation land, ensuring that the Master Plan is current and accurate. Ms. Lind explained that there would be an opportunity to include comments on each section.

Mr. Francisco inquired about the accelerated growth in population and whether there are collaborative efforts to manage traffic in response to this expansion. Ms. Lind noted that there are no projections available to match the growth rate and would reach out to Nitsch Engineering to further address traffic volumes and potential solutions. Mr. Francisco also suggested that a recreation facilities map be available to residents.

Public Q& A

Mr. Sopka commented on the inaccuracies in the depiction of the safety crash clusters, specifically pointing out that the intersection of Route 119 and Broadmeadow Road intersects with an additional state route (Rt 40), representing two significant traffic sources. Ms. Lind acknowledged the observation and assured that the additional state route would be correctly identified.

Nancy Muller provided comments on the demographic data, suggesting that the age groups should be contextualized within the broader projections and racial considerations. She recommended anticipating the impact on employment and examining how the taxes and revenues might be affected, especially in the absence of commercial activities.

Ms. Lind outlined the upcoming tasks and next steps to be taken.

* The Draft Inventory and Assessment review is expected to begin on January 30th.
* The Second Community Forum is scheduled for February 6, 2024, 2:30PM-3:30PM and 7:00PM-8:00PM at the Groton Center. Ms. Lind requested that any Planning Board members attending the forum should arrive 15 minutes early.
* The Second Community Survey is scheduled to launch on February 6th and will run through March 5th.
* The Barrett Planning Group will attend the Planning Board Meeting scheduled for March 14, 2024.

Mr. Francisco inquired whether the information presented today would be the same information that would be covered at the forum. Ms. Lind stated that the content would be the same, however, an alternative format would be utilized and printouts would be made available for reference during the presentation.

Public Q & A

* Ms. Muller requested clarification regarding the repetition of certain questions in the second community survey. In response, Ms. Lind explained that the demographic questions remained consistent to identify the respondents and assured that the other sections of the survey would feature new questions.

Ms. Lind recommended that any additional questions or comments be forwarded to Mr. Tada.

***Discussion – Hayes Woods Lane, Construction Monitoring Update***

Mr. Tada displayed the soil testing field results that were received from Yankee Engineering and Testing Inc. He emphasized that the developer had proceeded to pave half of the road without obtaining the necessary inspection from Nitsch Engineering. The developer was requested to halt any further work. Nitsch Engineering has also received the testing results and would be conducting a thorough review, offering any necessary comments. Mr. Burke requested that it be determined the exact weather conditions on that day of the unauthorized work. Mr. Tada said that he would contact Dillis and Roy Civil Design Group to pinpoint the exact day when the asphalt was laid down and gather information about the prevailing temperature conditions.

***Project Updates***

* Groton Hill Music Center

There were no new updates to share.

* Village at Shepley Hill

There were no new updates to share.

* 240 Main Street, Kilbourn Place

Mr. Tada informed the Board that Kalene Gendron has taken over the role of Health Agent from Ira Grossman at the Nashoba Associated Boards of Health. Ms. Gendron is actively addressing the noise complaints, though resolution is a time consuming process. Ms. Black presented the drafted letter of concerns, emphasizing that the existing sign is obscured and recommended relocating it for better visibility. She highlighted the lack of lawn and vegetation that was missing, suggesting that the developer revisit the issue in the spring. The Planning Board agreed that the as-built plan submitted indicated more vegetation than what was actually planted.

Ms. Black said that there have been concerns raised about the parking lot and limited signage. It was also brought to Mr. Tada's attention that the parking lot lights are not turning off at an appropriate time, and needs to be further assessed. While there has been no official correspondence from the Planning Board, Mr. Tada said that he would forward Ms. Black's letter to the developer and to the building inspector for necessary action.

* Bank of America ATM, 167 Main Street

There were no new updates to share.

***Committee Updates***

* Complete Streets Committee

Mr. Tada said Tom Delaney; the Director of Public Works is actively working on a bid package for the construction of sidewalks. This initiative encompasses extending the sidewalk from Lowell Road to Gibbet Hill Grill; and further extending the sidewalk from Blood Farm in West Groton to the Groton Center. Mr. Bonnett recommended that this information be incorporated into the Master Plan.

* Community Preservation Committee

Mr. Tada said that the next public hearing is scheduled for Monday, January 29, 2024 to provide feedback to the applicants that had submitted draft applications for CPA funding.

* Conductorlab Oversight Committee

Mr. Tada reported that the Committee engaged in discussions with the peer review consultants, setting the stage for a follow-up meeting scheduled for Monday, January 29, 2024 at 1:00PM. The upcoming session presents an opportunity to seek answers and responses from Honeywell Corporation in addressing questions and concerns.

* Firearm Sale Regulation Study Committee

Mr. Tada said the Committee held its first meeting earlier today. Mr. Francisco noted that there were five participants and the session was described as highly productive.

***General Business***

* ZBA Updates
  + Heritage Landing 40B- The traffic study was submitted to the Town on January 11th. Unfortunately, the time window for the Town’s Traffic Peer Review Engineer to thoroughly assess the results was insufficient and would be discussed at the next meeting on February 7, 2024. Nitsch Engineering has also provided comments on the revised civil engineering site plans and further input is anticipated from the developer at that time.
* Meeting Minutes
  + December 14, 2023

**MOTION:** Ms. Black made a motion to approve the minutes from the December 14, 2023, meeting. Ms. Bedard seconded the motion.

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

Yea: Ms. Black, Ms. Bedard, 4 Mr. Francisco, and Mr. Wilson

Nay: 0

**MOTION CARRIED. 4-1-0 Mr. Bonnett- abstain**

***Planning Board Meeting Schedule***

* February 6, 2024 – Master Plan Community Forums (Snow Date: 2/27)
* February 8, 2024
* February 22, 2024

***Adjournment***

At approximately 8:54PM. Mr. Francisco made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Black seconded the motion.

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

Yea: Mr. Bonnett, Ms. Black, Ms. Bedard 5 Mr. Francisco, and Mr. Wilson

Nay: 0

**MOTION CARRIED. 5-0-0**

Respectfully submitted:

Kristine Fox

Minute Taker

*Approved 2/22/2024*