**TOWN OF GROTON PLANNING BOARD**

**September 12, 2024**

**Meeting Minutes**

A virtual meeting of the Planning Board was held on Thursday, September 12, 2024, at 7:00 p.m.

**Members Present:**

Mr. Scott Wilson, Chair

Ms. Lorayne Black, Vice-Chair

Mr. Phil Francisco, Clerk

Mr. George Barringer, Board Member

Mr. David Bonnett, Board Member

**Members Not Present:**

Mr. Russell Burke, Board Member

Mr. Paul Hathaway, Board Member

**Also Present:**

Mr. Takashi Tada, Land Use Director/Town Planner

Per the Massachusetts Attorney General’s guidance regarding the Massachusetts Wiretap Statute, Mr. Wilson stated that the meeting was virtual and recorded, and all votes must be taken via roll call. Mr. Wilson introduced the Planning Board members who were present in the remote meeting.

***Public Hearing – Definitive Subdivision Plan and Special Permit for Major Residential Development, “Gratuity Brook Farm Estates,” 63 Gratuity Road, Assessor’s Parcel 216-47***

Mr. Tada stated that the applicant, Routhier & Roper Gratuity Road, LLC., was present, as was Attorney Melissa Robbins, Farrell & Robbins, PC., Matt Waterman, Civil Engineer, LandTech Consultants, and Dan LaCivita, Transportation Engineer, VAI.

Attorney Robbins stated that the applicant had already appeared before the Board for a preliminary subdivision that the Planning Board reviewed. She said they decided to proceed with a conventional subdivision that would provide for an age-restricted (55-year-old plus) community. She said the 55-plus project would result in less traffic and less impact on many of the town services. However, she pointed out that the project would not have any provisions for affordable units, noting that the proponent was willing to make a large donation to the Affordable Housing Trust Fund. She indicated that each unit would be approximately 2,200 square feet.

Attorney Robbins commented that by using the major residential development guidelines from the Town of Groton, they were able to provide a large amount of open space in the development, noting that 22 acres would be donated to the Conservation Commission, and almost 50% of each of the lots would be preserved as open space.

Application Materials Included:

* Definitive Subdivision Plan, LandTech Consultants (8/12/24)
* Supplemental Data & Environmental Impact Report
* Stormwater Management Report
* Operation & Maintenance Manual & Long-Term Pollution Prevention Plan
* Volume Calculation and Plan for Cut & Fill
* Lighting Plan (Dark Sky Compliant, Downward Facing, & below 3,000 Kelvins)
* Transportation Impact Assess, VAI (4/23/24)
* Architectural Drawings, Giattino Design

Mr. Matt Waterman addressed the Board and reviewed the definitive subdivision plan. Two cul-de-sac roads are proposed: Gerard Way, off Gratuity Road; and Therese Lane, off Jenkins Road. Each of the cul-de-sac roads is approximately 950 feet long and 22 feet wide, with a sidewalk along one side. Utilities including town water, electricity, and telephone/cable will be installed underground. Two on-site, centralized septic systems are proposed, one for each portion of the development. A chain-link fence with a gap for wildlife passage is proposed along the western property boundary with Hazel Grove Park.

Mr. Waterman added that the proposed stormwater management system is decentralized and includes a combination of Best Management Practices (BMPs) to achieve over 80 percent removal of total suspended solids, as well as meeting the other required stormwater performance standards.

Ms. Black asked if the units will have basements and, if so, if they will be raised above existing grades to avoid the high groundwater. Mr. Waterman said they would be raising the site to meet offsets to groundwater.

 Mr. Francisco asked if the units would be ADA-compliant. Attorney Robbins replied that the units would be ADA-adaptable but would not be ADA-accessible. All units will have master bathrooms of the first floor. Mr. Francisco also asked if the internal open space areas would be permanently restricted. Attorney Robbins replied in the affirmative and said it would be codified in the condominium documents and enforced by the condo association.

 Mr. Waterman reviewed the proposed landscaping plan and, again, noted the large amount of open space, which would be approximately 76%, including the wetlands. The existing vegetation will be maintained wherever possible. There is a proposed meadow restoration area on the Gratuity Road side.

 Mr. Wilson stated that he felt the side-loaded designed homes were the most desirable. Mr. Waterman replied that the subdivision regulations require variation in the home design and configuration, but he would certainly look into it.

 Mr. Barringer asked if there was any way to provide separation between the shared driveways on the front-loading units, as shared driveways have a history of not working out very well. Mr. Waterman replied that he would ask the developer about it.

 Mr. Barringer also asked if the proposed light fixtures would comply with International Dark Sky standards and have a color temperature less than 3000K. Mr. Waterman said they were proposing residential lamp posts, 6 feet in height, that would automatically turn on at dusk and turn off at dawn, and would comply with Dark Sky standards. Mr. Barringer suggested it would be preferable to allow the residents to control the street lamps.

 Mr. Bonnett asked Mr. Waterman to confirm that all the sediment basins were infiltration basins. Mr. Waterman replied in the affirmative. Mr. Bonnett asked if there was any discharge from them other than groundwater. Mr. Waterman replied that he was fairly sure that they all had emergency overflows, but he would confirm that.

Ms. Black noted that she would like to see more trees planted and was happy to see that many trees would be saved during the clearing process. She also asked if there would be any screen planting to soften the raised septic leach fields. Ms. Black stated that she would like to see a species list. She also suggested adding more shade trees at the entrance near Gratuity Road.

Dan LaCivita, Transportation Engineer, Vanasse & Associates, Inc., addressed the Board and stated that on June 5, 2023, VAI had prepared a Transportation Impact Assessment (TIA) for the construction of 33 conventional (non-age-restricted) single-family homes; the results were presented to the Planning Board. He further said that on July 11, 2023, VAI prepared an updated Transportation Impact Assessment that was responsive to all of Nitsch Engineering’s original comments. He said that on April 23, 2024, the project underwent modifications and was reduced to 28 age-restricted (55+) single-family homes. This resulted in a lessened traffic impact, as shown in the new Transportation Impact Assessment prepared for the updated development proposal.

Mr. LaCivita said that on September 10, 2024, VAI received updated Peer Review comments from Nitsch Engineering, the majority of which do not pertain to the methodology used to develop the traffic study and are not expected to result in significant changes to the findings of the traffic study. He said they plan to provide written responses to all of Nitsch’s comments in the coming weeks.

Mr. LaCivita reviewed the 2024 Transportation Impact Assessment, which included the following summarization:

* Updated traffic volumes were collected in March 2024 while schools were in regular session and were adjusted accordingly.
* The Project will not result in a significant impact on motorist delays or vehicle queuing over anticipated future conditions without the Project (No-Build condition,) with Project-related impact generally defined as an increase in averaged motorist delay of less than 1.0 seconds that resulted in an increase in vehicle queuing of up to two feet and less than one vehicle.
* The Jenkins Road/Hickory Drive intersection was found to continue to have a motor vehicle crash rate above the MassDOT average crash rate for a similar intersection; however, this is due to the low volume of traffic at the intersection and lines of sight at the proposed intersections of Gerard Way and Therse Lane continue to exceed or can be made to exceed the recommended minimum distances for safe and efficient operation.
* The average weekday additional vehicle trips would be 164; however, a vehicle trip was only one-way.

Regarding site access and circulation, Mr. LaCivita said:

* Gerard Way and Therese Lane should be a minimum of 22 feet in width and designed to accommodate the turning and maneuvering requirements of the largest anticipated responding emergency vehicle.
* Driveways to the units should be a minimum of 21 feet long where a sidewalk was provided and 23 feet between the garage door and the edge of the traveled way in locations without a sidewalk.
* Stop signs with stop lines provided at exits.
* Trees and vegetation located within the sight line of the proposed Therese Lane intersection with Jenkins Road shall be selectively trimmed or removed.
* ADA-compliant wheelchair ramps are to be provided at pedestrian crossings and are to be constructed or modified in conjunction with the project.

Mr. Wilson asked if there were members of the public who had questions or comments.

Mr. Adam Burnett, 155 Gratuity Road, provided the following comments:

* The area had very high groundwater. He said he had experienced severe flooding near his house.
* The Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program had documented the existence of rare salamanders.
* Questioned why such a high-density development was being proposed.
* Strongly rejected a chain-link fence.

Mr. Burnett commented that he would send a letter to the Planning Board stating his concerns.

Mr. Tada read aloud a comment from Mr. Ken Breeman, summarized as follows:

“Gratuity Brook has overflowed its banks every year, at least once a year. The units nearest to the brook may need additional drainage.”

Paula Martin, 88 Jenkins Road, and Kelly Martin, 90 Jenkins Road, addressed the Board via Zoom and echoed the previously stated concerns, especially with regard to flooding, traffic at the Jenkins Road intersection, and conservation.

Comments also received were:

* Anna Eliot, via email received on 8/26/24.
* Hazel Grove Agricultural Association, via email received on 9/9/24.
* Board of Health letter – received on 9/9/24.
* Nitsch Engineering – Transportation Peer Review letter, received on 9/10/24
* Nitsch Engineering – Civil Peer Review letter – received on 9/11/24.

**MOTION:** Mr. Barringer made a motion to continue the public hearing regarding the Definitive Subdivision Plan and Special Permit for Major Residential Development, “Gratuity Brook Farm Estates,” 63 Gratuity Road, Assessor’s Parcel 216-47, date specific, to October 10, 2024, at 7:00 p.m. Mr. Francisco seconded the motion.

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

Yea: Mr. Barringer, Mr. Bonnett, Ms. Black, 5

 Mr. Francisco, and Mr. Wilson.

 Nay: 0

 **MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.**

***Public Hearing – Proposed Zoning Bylaw Amendment, Accessory Dwelling Units***

* Mr. Tada summarized some of the proposed zoning bylaw amendments to comply with new requirements pursuant to the Affordable Homes Act of 2025, to take effect on 2/2/25.
* Draft ADU (Accessory Dwelling Units) zoning bylaw includes input from Brian Falk, Town Counsel, 9/5/24.
* Comments from Russ Burke, 9/12/24.
* Planning Board recommendation needed for Fall Town Meeting to be held on 10/5/24.

Mr. Wilson asked Mr. Tada if he felt the zoning amendment article was ready to go to the Fall Town Meeting. Mr. Tada replied that Town Counsel had vetted it.

Mr. John Sopka, 344 Boston Road, addressed the Board via Zoom and asked the following questions:

* He felt that ADUs should be allowed in the Town of Groton, where duplex family houses existed if two separate families owned them.
* He also said he did not feel that an ADU had to have a dedicated parking spot.

**MOTION:** Mr. Barringer made a motion to close the public hearing regarding the Proposed Zoning Bylaw Amendment, Accessory Dwelling Units.

Ms. Black seconded the motion.

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

Yea: Mr. Barringer, Mr. Bonnett, Ms. Black, 5

 Mr. Francisco, and Mr. Wilson.

 Nay: 0

 **MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.**

**MOTION:** Mr. Barringer made a motion to forward the amended version of the draft bylaw to the Select Board for inclusion in the Warrant. Mr. Francisco seconded the motion.

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

Yea: Mr. Barringer, Mr. Bonnett, Ms. Black, 5

 Mr. Francisco, and Mr. Wilson.

 Nay: 0

 **MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.**

***Public Hearing (Continuation)***

***Preliminary Subdivision Plan – “Casella Acres,” Wyman Road, Assessors’ Parcel 229-58.***

* The applicant submitted a request to continue the hearing to September 26, 2024, and an authorization to extend the deadline for review of a Preliminary Plan.

***Discussion – Approval Not Required (ANR) Plan, 193 Chicopee Row***

* The applicant submitted a request to continue the matter to September 26, 2024, and an authorization to extend the deadline for review of the ANR Plan.

***Discussion – Notice of Intent to Sell/Convert Chapter 61 Land to Residential Use, Sand Hill Road & Common Street***

* Notice provided by Attorney Kyle J. Croteau on August 16, 2024.
* Affects 2.59 acres of land on Sand Hill Road, near Common Street.
* Planning Board recommendation requested by the Select Board.

Mr. Francisco asked what precisely the Select Board was asking the Planning Board to provide a recommendation on. Mr. Tada replied that the Planning Board was being asked to provide a recommendation as to whether there was a reason for the town to exercise its right of first refusal option to acquire the parcel at the stated price.

Mr. Tada commented that the Conservation Commission would have a site walk on the property (9/21/24) and would then meet to discuss their findings.

The Planning Board collectively decided not to make a recommendation until the Conservation Commission provided their recommendation.

***Discussion – Master Plan Update and GrotonFest Booth Plans***

* Jill Slankas and Tony Duong of the Barrett Planning Group were present to discuss the item. However, they had to sign off at 9:30 p.m. They will provide a memorandum to update the Planning Board, and make sure they were all on the same page regarding the master plan.
* Mr. Tada said he would renew the GrotonFest flyer ad in *The Groton Herald* for another two weeks.

***Project Updates***

* 25 Station Avenue – Special Permit (added 9/11/2024)
	+ Potential transfer of Special Permit to new owners.
* Groton Hill Music Center – There were no updates.
* Village at Shepley Hill – There were no updates.
* Kilbourn Place, 240 Main Street – There were no updates.
* Village Meadows (Bluebird Lane) – There were no updates.
* Groton Farms, 500 Main Street – There were no updates.
* Monarch Path Subdivision
	+ Monarch Path Road acceptance is to be discussed on 9/26/24 with a potential recommendation to the Select Board; waiting to receive the final As-Built Plan from the developer.
	+ Modification of Monarch Path Definitive Plan – Need to file a decision with the Town Clerk to be recorded with the revised plan.

***Committee Updates***

* Complete Streets Committee
	+ Sidewalk construction underway (West Main Street & Lowell Road)
* Community Preservation Committee – There were no updates.
* Conductorlab Oversight Committee – There were no new updates.
* ZBA Updates – There were no new updates.
* Sign Committee
	+ The Sign Committee would hold a public hearing the following Monday on a proposed sign for the second cannabis dispensary at 1 Forge Village Road.

***General Business***

* Meeting Minutes

* + June 27, 2024

**MOTION:** Mr. Barringer made a motion to approve the minutes from the June 27, 2024, meeting, as amended with a minor correction. Ms. Black seconded the motion.

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

Yea: Mr. Barringer, Mr. Bonnett, Ms. Black, 5

 Mr. Francisco, and Mr. Wilson.

 Nay: 0

 **MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.**

* + July 11, 2024

**MOTION:** Mr. Barringer made a motion to approve the minutes from the July 11, 2024, meeting, as presented. Mr. Francisco seconded the motion.

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

Yea: Mr. Barringer, Mr. Bonnett, 4

 Mr. Francisco, and Mr. Wilson.

 Nay: 0

 **MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 1. (Abstained – Ms. Black)**

***Planning Board Meeting Schedule***

* September 26, 2024 – (via Zoom)
* September 28, 2024 – Groton Fest
* October 5, 2024 – Fall Town Meeting
* October 10, 2024 – In-Person
* October 24, 2024 – (via Zoom)

***Adjournment***

At approximately 10:30 p.m., Ms. Black made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Barringer seconded the motion.

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

Yea: Mr. Barringer, Mr. Bonnett, Ms. Black, 5

 Mr. Francisco, and Mr. Wilson.

 Nay: 0

 **MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.**

Respectfully submitted:

Trish Gedziun

Recording Secretary

*Approved 11/14/2024*