

CITY OF KEENE
NEW HAMPSHIRE

JOINT PUBLIC WORKSHOP
PLANNING BOARD/
PLANNING, LICENSES, AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, February 11, 2019

6:30 PM

Council Chambers

Planning Board Members Present

Douglas Barrett, Chairman
Chris Cusack, Vice-Chair
Andrew Weglinski
Martha Landry
Mayor Kendall Lane

**Planning, Licenses and Development
Committee Members Present**

David Richards, Chairman
Councilor Philip Jones
Councilor Bart Sapeta
Councilor Margaret Rice

Planning Board Members Not Present

Michael Burke
Pamela Russell Slack
Gary Spykman
Councilor George Hansel

**Planning, Licenses and Development
Committee Members Not Present**

Councilor George Hansel

Staff Present

Rhett Lamb, ACM/Com. Development Director
Med Kopczynski, Economic Development
Director
Mari Brunner, Acting Planner

1. Roll Call

Chair Barrett called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm and a roll call was taken.

2. January 14, 2019 meeting minutes

A motion was made by Mayor Kendall Lane that the Joint Committee accept the January 14, 2019 meeting minutes. The motion was seconded by Councilor Phil Jones and was unanimously approved.

3. Downtown Zoning Update Workshop with City Council

Asst. City Manager/Community Development Director Rhett Lamb and Economic Development Director Med Kopczynski addressed the Committee. Mr. Lamb gave a brief recap of the past few Joint Committee meetings where this topic was addressed. He said that after the January meeting, a draft of the downtown zoning map and sub-districts was sent back to the consultant for another round of review. The consultant has provided a report, which is included in the agenda packet. Tonight, staff would like to review the consultant's recommendations with the committee to confirm the details and go through a series of questions.

Mr. Kopczynski stated what staff would like to do today is to discuss the consultant's recommendations. Staff would also like to confirm the map, confirm sub-district types, locations, and standards for building height, setbacks, and parking. Mr. Kopczynski referred to a map which summarizes the changes made at the January meeting. The red line indicates the initial area that was proposed as the downtown boundary and noted that the green and blue areas are the areas that staff understood were to be added to the sub-districts. Mr. Lamb added that the green indicates areas that the Committee proposed to add to the Residential Transition zone; this includes what is

currently the Office district with the exception of the area of Office north of Beaver Street along the Washington Street corridor. The area south of the roundabout at Marlboro Street was also included in the green area. The blue area is what the Committee referred to as the “Commercial Transition” zone (a fourth sub-district which was added at the January meeting). The blue zone includes the area on Marlboro Street to Adams Street, the area around Ralston Street, and the area around Norway Avenue.

Mr. Kopczynski stated the consultant agreed with the essence of the work of the committee with a few exceptions: The first is in reference to the Keene State College campus – their comment is that the scale of these buildings and pattern of development are not consistent with the Residential Transition zone. They note that if the campus is to be added, it would make more sense to add a sub-district to address the unique form of development in this area. Their recommendation is to remove the campus from the downtown form-based zoning area entirely.

The second is in reference to the parcels abutting Foundry Street. The consultants recommend removing the parcels on the west side of Foundry Street, which are mostly residential properties and automobile-oriented businesses that lack connectivity with the rest of the downtown area. Mayor Lane stated the issue with Foundry Street is not what is there today but what it is going to be there in the future. He felt the west side of Foundry Street should be included in the blue area (commercial transition). He said the Committee should think about what they would like to see in the future and zone the area accordingly. He noted that this area will most likely be redeveloped if it is zoned appropriately. Mr. Kopczynski stated what is important to keep in mind is that the committee is clear on form based zoning because there was some confusion with underlying zoning, form-based zoning, and how it inter-relates with 79E. With reference to Foundry Street, it is important to keep in mind how the City wants it to look and what kind of massing the City wants on this street.

With regards to the areas around Wilcox Terrace and Harrison Streets, the consultants note that the “Commercial Edge” zone serves the same purpose as the “Residential Transition” zone, which is to ramp down intensity and transition from a downtown to a residential area. Therefore, it is not necessary to have a Residential Transition zone next to a Commercial Edge zone, as they serve the same purpose.

The consultants note that the area east of Carpenter Street including Pat Russell Field is not easily accessible from downtown; if the City wants it to remain as green space they feel it should be designated as open space (i.e., we don’t want 7-story buildings there). Mr. Lamb noted what the consultant is saying is the area directly adjacent shown as the outer core could have the potential to include seven story buildings, which would then require a transition zone on the east side of Carpenter Street. As a result, the recommendation is to not include Carpenter Street in form-based zoning and instead zone it as something that would indicate its use as open space.

Staff referred to a rendering that depicts a transect of the different form-based zones, including Downtown Core, Outer Core, and Residential Transition, and how they transition to adjacent residential uses outside the downtown form-based zones. Mr. Kopczynski noted that in this case, there is a higher density with medium heights in the Downtown Core, slightly less density with taller heights in the Outer Core, and smaller buildings with reduced heights and greater setbacks in the Residential Transition. Mr. Lamb noted that sidewalks are more generous in the Downtown Core and there is higher pedestrian activity in this area, and added that the Residential Transition area includes a mix of commercial uses, but at a residential scale.

Next, Mr. Kopczynski referred to a graphic which depicts “Commercial Edge” in place of “Residential Transition” in the transect. Mr. Lamb said that the main difference is that the Commercial Edge would have a larger scale than a residential area and more parking, as these uses will require more accommodations for vehicles. Staff asked for feedback from the Committee.

Councilor Sapeta referred to the Outer Core zone, noting that Gilbo Avenue is the most under-utilized area in the downtown, and asked whether it would be prudent to extend the Downtown Core zone along Gilbo Avenue so density could be increased in this area. He stated he agreed with the Mayor regarding Foundry Street. The Mayor agreed that Gilbo Avenue is an under-developed area and is an area which could see substantial development in the future, and noted that from a terminology point of view, the term “Outer Core” represents areas that are prime for redevelopment. Mr. Lamb stated the Mayor is correct and added at the present time the difference between the downtown core and the outer core is setbacks – the “build-to” line is 0 to 5 feet in the Downtown Core, which will help create a seamless edge along the edge of the sidewalk. In the Outer Core the “build-to” line is 0 to 15 feet because the right-of-way/street width is not as generous in these areas so a larger setback will avoid creating a “canyon effect” with tall buildings. Mr. Kopczynski said that parking is a little more generous in this area as well.

Mr. Burke referred to the properties west of Foundry Street and asked about their current use and zoning. Mr. Lamb replied that they are in the Commerce zone, and they are primarily commercial uses with outdoor displays and an orientation toward automobiles, not pedestrians. The consultants recommended not including this area in the downtown form-based zone because the form and orientation towards automobiles in this area doesn’t currently fit with the downtown form, and would need to change significantly to fit in.

Mayor Lane felt not including the Pat Russell Park into downtown core is not going to be an issue as this is not going to be an area that would be developed. However, he felt the college is a different issue and that the campus needs to be included as part of the downtown. He agreed with the consultants that the campus does not fit the model of the Residential Transition area, and possibly it doesn’t fit any of the sub-district types. Perhaps the closest one is the Outer Core zone. He added that it is likely that some areas of the campus will get redeveloped and will have more high-rise buildings. Although legally the college is not subject to the City’s zoning, it is probable that they would work with the City to be consistent with our zoning.

Councilor Rice asked whether the college has been approached about this issue. Mayor Lane stated they have indicated they would like to be part of the downtown and added this is something the Mayor, the City-College Commission, and their President have been working on. The college is working on their master plan and as part of their update, they are looking at how best to incorporate the college into the downtown.

The Councilor asked whether the college could be brought to the table so they can better advocate for themselves. Dr. Cusack stated he is on the City-College Commission and this is an item that was raised as a topic of conversation. Councilor Sapeta felt the City-College Commission was the appropriate venue for this discussion to happen.

Ms. Landry asked what the rationale was for taking out Wilcox Terrace as a residential transition zone. Ms. Brunner stated the reasoning is that a Residential Transition zone is not required next to a Commercial transition zone because they both serve the same purpose of transitioning from more intense to less intense areas. She referred back to the graphics that showed the two transects and how the built form changes from one district to the next.

Chair Barrett said that he does not feel strongly about whether or not the college campus is included, however he asked staff to give more consideration to where the boundary line is drawn. Currently, it bisects a building. He also referred to the Blake Street area and noted this is an area where owner occupied units were to be encouraged and asked whether this should be considered to be made part of the downtown.

Mr. Kopczynski stated there needs to be some transition area from the hard core of the downtown to the residential areas. The Mayor referred to the neighborhood near Water Street, Grove Street, and Willow Street and said this area needs to be addressed. Mr. Kopczynski said that is a question for the board and asked what type of development they would like to see in this area. Do they want the built form to change significantly? The Mayor noted that this area could probably fit into the Residential Transition sub-district. Mr. Lamb brought up the question of uses and said the group should start thinking about what type of uses are allowed in each sub-district.

Chair Richards said that he agrees that combining the Office District with the Residential Transition areas makes sense. He referred to the Commercial Transition sub-district and noted parking is being suggested to be located to the front, side and rear and asked whether it should be tightened so that parking could be located more to the rear. He doesn't want this area to look like a strip mall developed in the 1950s and 1960s.

Mr. Kopczynski stated parking requirements is a topic that still needs to be discussed, along with other issues such as maintenance. There was discussion about SEED District and how the incentives provided within the SEED District as it applies to height and parking could be applied to the downtown zoning. The City offers "carrots" in the form of allowing developers to do something they wouldn't otherwise be allowed to do, such as build taller buildings, in return for building "green" buildings. Councilor Rice asked about incentives with respect to parking, and staff noted that the SEED District incentivizes green buildings by allowing developers to provide less parking than would otherwise be required.

Chair Barrett stated it seems like there is agreement today regarding the area north of Davis Street on the west and Water Street on the east as to what is shown on the map. Most of the discussion today has also been about the southern area, Foundry Street, Blake Street, Wilcox Terrace, the college neighborhood, and Willow Street. He said the Committee should go through each of these areas one by one to reach consensus on where the boundary should be.

Ms. Brunner called the committee's attention to the area north of Vernon Street (an area the consultant had referred to) – they noted the area between Mechanic and Vernon Street is part of the downtown core today. The consultant wanted to know if the committee wanted this area to be developed in the same manner as the downtown or be made part of another sub-district. Chair Barrett said this area should be added to the list.

West of Foundry Street – Chair Barrett stated he favors including the west side of Foundry Street but would leave out the motor cycle shop and car dealership. He said it is more important to look at the built form than to focus on a natural boundary like the river. Ms. Landry reiterated what the Mayor stated as to what this area could be in the future. Councilor Richards agreed and said he would be in favor of including these parcels.

Councilor Jones asked whether by including these areas in the downtown zoning district, this could eventually expand the 79E District. Mr. Kopczynski stated it could; that decision would ultimately

be up to the City Council to make. Councilor Sapeta asked whether the westerly portion of Foundry Street should be included in the Downtown Outer Core and south of that should be Residential Transition.

Chair Barrett suggested extending the downtown boundary west to the river with a southern boundary on Winchester Street and including this area in the Commercial Edge sub-district; there was general agreement from the Committee with this suggestion.

Councilor Sapeta asked for more distinct colors on the map for next time.

Wilcox Terrace and Blake Street – Chair Barrett stated one suggestion would be to extend the downtown boundary all the way to Winchester Street and make that entire pocket into Residential Transition. Councilor Jones raised a concern that if this change was put in place the SEED District could get eliminated in this area when the overlay is taken away. Mr. Lamb stated this is not necessarily the case because it has not been decided as to what is going to be done with the SEED District. Mr. Lamb added there might be overlays which might be preserved by incorporating them into the form-based zone and SEED could be one of those. Mr. Kopczynski pointed out the SEED concept was embedded in the business growth redevelopment area (not as an overlay).

Dr. Cusack asked if Davis Street and Blake Street were turned into Residential Transition and included in this district, and low intensity commercial uses are permitted, whether this commercial use could include a bar. Mr. Lamb stated if the City was to follow the Office district concept a bar would not be permitted.

Keene State College Campus – Chair Barrett then addressed the issue of including the college in the downtown core which he stated he had spoken against at a prior meeting. Ms. Landry asked for clarification on whether the whole campus or just a portion of the campus was being proposed to be included. Mayor Lane said that the portion of the campus along Main Street up to Wyman Way is the area he is most concerned with including. Mr. Kopczynski felt this is a discussion that should also happen with City College commission. Councilor Sapeta agreed there has to be some discussion happening with the college and said the buildings at the corner of Winchester Street and Main Street are not likely to change any time in the future. However, he sees the former hospital building seeing some change, which is further down south. The Councilor stated he was in favor of retaining Residential Transition on the east side of Main Street through Elliot Street as some of these uses are likely to change.

Councilor Richards said that he agrees with the consultants that Residential Transition is not the right fit for the campus on the west side of Main Street; the group discussed this area being in the “Outer Core” sub-district. Ms. Landry stated she serves on the Historical Society Board and noted the Bruder House is going through some renovation at this time. Ms. Landry expressed concern about a district that would permit seven story buildings right up to these historic buildings.

Chair Richards said the college is asking to be included in the downtown core but couldn’t see the college actually constructing seven story buildings. Mayor Lane stated the college is looking at redoing Elliot Hall and buildings located from Wyman Way north.

Southern side of Water Street/west side of Grove Street – Chair Barrett stated what he is hearing is to extend the downtown boundary all the way to Grove Street, and then the pocket this creates would be Residential Transition. The committee was in agreement with this suggestion.

Area between Mechanic Street and Vernon Street – Mr. Lamb noted that the first version of the downtown map that the consultant proposed had the Downtown Core stopping at Vernon Street. When the committee decided to reduce the number of sub-districts, this area got combined with the Downtown Core sub-district and now it extends through Mechanic Street. Along Washington Street and Court Street there are primarily two story buildings which don't match the downtown core and this is the reason the consultant wanted to verify that the Downtown Core should go down that far north.

Councilor Rice noted it was discussed previously that there are office uses in this area and that the committee was okay with these buildings being bigger and asked whether this was still the committee's understanding. Mr. Lamb stated along the spine of Elm Street there are some larger office buildings. Chair Barrett stated his understanding of the major difference between the downtown Outer Core versus the Commercial Edge was seven stories versus three stories. Councilor Rice asked whether Chair Barrett was suggesting changing this area from Downtown Core to Outer Core. Chair Barret said he is wondering if Commercial Edge would be appropriate for this area.

Councilor Sapeta referred to the area between Mechanic Street and Vernon Street and felt this area doesn't have as much opportunity for redevelopment in the future and asked which one of the four districts would allow for developers to be more creative in this area. He is not sure which of the sub-districts it would fit into.

Mr. Lamb referred to language from the consultant's report where they refer to buildings in the Mechanic/Vernon Street areas as being lower in height compared to the downtown core (up to five stories), and recognized the frontage was important for Court and Washington Streets because of the reuse of historic structures along these streets. Councilor Jones did not feel commercial edge would be the best option as this would allow for possible location of parking in the front – Chair Barrett noted as suggested by Chair Richards front parking was going to be eliminated with Commercial Edge. Councilor Richards said he would not want to see seven story buildings in this area. He said that it makes sense to keep Residential Transition to the north of the area between Mechanic Street and Vernon Street. Chair Barret said that based on the current sub-district options, if the committee does not want to see seven story buildings then that leaves Commercial Edge and Residential Transition.

Councilor Sapeta said that from the perspective of building height, Commercial Edge could make sense; however he wasn't sure that the proposed setbacks for the Commercial Edge sub-district would fit this area. He asked whether the setback should be reduced so the difference in the maximum front setback from the Downtown Core to Commercial Edge isn't as great. Mr. Lamb agreed if parking is going to be eliminated from the front, a 30 foot setback would not be necessary. Chair Barret clarified that the setbacks are shown as a range from zero to 30 feet.

Ms. Brunner asked the committee to keep in mind the historic district overlay boundary and noted that the reason the consultants wanted to change the term from "Commercial Transition" to "Commercial Edge" was to try and differentiate between the built environment but not for the uses that will be allowed.

Chair Barrett asked whether the Committee would agree on the north side to keep the downtown boundary where it is and change the block between Mechanic Street, Vernon Street, Court Street and Washington Street to Commercial Edge. Councilor Jones stated he would agree with this proposal if the setback and front parking would change. Mr. Lamb stated there is plan to make a

change to parking in the front for commercial edge. As a result, it would make sense to reduce the frontage requirement. Councilor Jones said in that case, he is in favor of this proposal.

Items for Discussion:

Mr. Kopczynski stated once the form based discussion is completed then the committee would need to start discussing the underlying uses for each sub-district. In a purely form based environment there are no underlying uses; the zoning only deals with the built form. However, the City is proposing a form-based district where use will still be regulated. He noted that there is a downtown district and a number of sub-districts that are overlaying the present zoning code uses. While the uses are being modernized there needs to be conversation about how the present uses are going to be changed to get the most benefit from form based zoning.

Councilor Sapeta noted Carpenter Field was removed from the downtown outer core but the Findings Building was also removed and asked whether there is any other way to encourage development of that parcel. He further stated the population of Keene has been stagnant in the last 30 years to about 25,000 and hoped we can grow the population. He stated he agrees with keeping Gilbo Avenue as downtown outer core and asked if it wouldn't be prudent if downtown extended all the way to School Street for future development and to help with population growth. He asked then committee to consider this before any final decision is made.

4. Staff update

Mr. Lamb stated the city is making great progress on what is being called "social service uses" in the zoning district; there was a separate contract for an analysis of definitions, processes and permitting for uses such as group homes, shelters, boarding houses, and lodging houses. Initial staff work has been successful and staff is happy as to how these uses are defined. Now the work is how these uses will be permitted and where they will be located in the city. Staff will be back with an ordinance at a later meeting, possibly by April. Mr. Kopczynski added that this will be done ahead of the larger UDO project, and it will be important to keep in mind as the project moves forward how these uses will be incorporated into the downtown form based zoning.

5. Next Meeting – Monday, March 11, 2019

6. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 8:05 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Krishni Pahl,
Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by Mari Brunner, Acting Planner