

January 7, 2020 Planning Board

Present were: Regular Members Tom McCue, Lori Langlois, Naomi Levesque, Greg Estrella, Richard Cassidy; Alternate Member Lane Strahan; Ex-Officio Members Lucie Remillard and Bryan Chevarie

Excused were: Regular Members Christina Lefebvre, Helene Rayborn; Alternate Members Aline Boucher, Tony Valliere, and Suzanne Wasileski

Others Present: Pamela Laflamme, Community Development Director; Michel Salek, Code Enforcement Officer

Public Comments

None

Approval of December Minutes

Ms. Levesque made a motion to accept the minutes of the December 3, 2019 meeting as typed. Ms. Remillard seconded the motion. All were in favor, the motion carried.

Zoning Discussion – Downtown Footprint, Industrial/Business Expansion; Other

Ms. Laflamme explained that the downtown footprint aspect of this agenda item will be discussed at a later meeting.

Members of the Board discussed the National Guard Armory building located at 2169 Riverside Drive (Map 404-Lot 1). The state has vacated the building and the City may take ownership of the property in the near future. The parcel is currently zoned as Rural Residential. It was noted that there is no specific nor anticipated plan for the utilization of the property at this time, however, the current zoning classification could potentially create problems in the future.

The group discussed potential benefits of a change in the zoning of the parcel. The question of spot zoning was raised. It was noted that the Board could be proactive about the situation as they wouldn't be changing the zoning for a specific use at this time. Therefore, it would not be considered spot zoning if the City ultimately decides to change the zoning classification under these conditions. It was noted that the property has been used for governmental purposes since it was built in the 1950s. If the City were to acquire the parcel and sell it at a later date to a private entity – the new owners would need to go through the site plan process and abutters' rights to weigh in on a new use of the property would be preserved. The City may ultimately keep the building for its own purposes, such as storage or as a bus garage. It has also been well discussed in the community as potentially being the location for a police station but does not seem to have much public support at this point.

The Industrial Park is located directly across the river from the armory building. The group discussed the idea at length the merits of including this parcel, Map 404-Lot 1, with the swath of land across the river and change the zoning classification from Rural Residential to Industrial Business. Ms. Laflamme shared a map with the board of what this would look like. She explained that while normally it is customary to follow naturally occurring boundaries such as roads, rivers, etc., when creating zoning boundaries, that is not always the case when you zoom out and look at the boundaries for the entire City.

Ms. Remillard made a motion to recommend to City Council that they change the zoning classification of Map 404-Lot 1 from Rural Residential to Industrial Business. Ms. Langlois seconded the motion. All were in favor, the motion carried.

Project Updates

Ms. Laflamme explained that Wildcat, LLC may attend the February Planning Board meeting to give a conceptual presentation regarding their proposed redevelopment of Brown School. There will not be a vote nor will there be a public hearing at this specific meeting, however, the developers will be prepared to discuss the project. It was noted that they do not own the property at this time but this step is part of the overall process.

Timberland Campground intends to submit a preliminary site plan for a site development of the land they purchased on West Milan Road. It is anticipated that they will present this at the February meeting.

The Burgess BioPower greenhouse project will likely present their plan to the Planning Board in March or April.

It has been determined that two City-owned properties need to be demolished soon. 121 Main Street and the Princess Movie Theater are in such disrepair that they are a liability for the City in their current state.

Other

Lot Mergers

Mr. McCue appointed Ms. Strahan as a voting member.

Map 138-Lots 61 & 62

Map 138-Lot 61 is the site of a single-family home. Map 138-Lot 62 is a vacant piece of land. Ms. Langlois made a motion to approve of the merging of these two lots. Ms. Strahan seconded the motion. All were in favor, the motion carried. This merging of lots will create a single 0.76 acre parcel that will retain the 1906 Riverside Drive address. It will be reflected in the upcoming 2020 tax year.

Map 104-Lots 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and Map 105-Lot 17

This application to merge lots came before the Planning Board at a prior meeting in 2019. It was granted approval on the condition that the lots all be placed into the same ownership structure. The taxpayer has taken the necessary steps to achieve this.

Map 104-Lot 2 is the site of a single family home. The other lots will be merged into Map 104-Lot 2 and will create a single 20.93 acre parcel that will retain the 159 Jericho Road address. It will be reflected in the 2020 tax year. Ms. Remillard made a motion to approve of the merging of these lots. Mr. Estrella seconded the motion. All were in favor, the motion carried

Public Comments

None.

Member Comments

Mr. Estrella asked if the snowmelt project is still in the works. Ms. Laflamme explained that the City will be applying for a grant for the endeavor this summer.

Mr. McCue spoke of an article in the Union Leader regarding the snowmelt project. There was also an article on the Brown School closing and redevelopment. He also shared an article from the New Hampshire Business Review relating to “apart-hotels.”

Mr. McCue noted that there are various bills in the NH legislature that are of interest to the City of Berlin. He brought up the idea of the group asking for our representatives to attend a Planning Board meeting to speak about relevant legislation. He also distributed a document from the handbook that the Office of Strategic Initiatives created. Specifically, the section of the handbook relating to proper procedures and behavior of Board members.

Planner Comments

Ms. Laflamme explained that April is membership month for the Planning Board. Ms. Boucher, currently an alternate, has given her resignation after fourteen years of service. Ms. Langlois' and Mr. Estrella's terms expire in April of 2020. Mr. Estrella is completing his third full term and therefore will no longer be able to be a regular member. This creates an open spot on the Board for a regular membership. Ms. Strahan has the longest tenure of the alternate members so she will have the opportunity to become a regular member.

Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the Board, Ms. Levesque made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Cassidy. All in favor, the motion carried. The meeting ended at 7:47 pm.

The next Planning Board meeting will be held on Tuesday, February 4, 2020.

Respectfully Submitted,
Bryan Chevarie