

# **D-R-A-F-T**

## **MILL PLAZA STUDY COMMITTEE MINUTES WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2007 DURHAM TOWN HALL – COUNCIL CHAMBERS 4:00 PM**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Dave Howland, Thomas Newkirk, Julian Smith, Edward Valena, Michael Davis, Perry Bryant (arrived at 5:15 PM), Chuck Cressy, Warren Daniel, Lorne Parnell, Crawford Mills (sitting in for Leslie Schwartz)

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Deborah Hirsch Mayer, Douglas Bencks, Edgar Ramos, Leslie Schwartz

**ALSO PRESENT:** Todd Selig, Town Administrator; Jim Campbell, Planner; members of the public: Nicholas Isaak, Robin Mower, Henry Smith, Richard Houghton, Edward Garcia, Neal Ferris, Malcolm Sandberg, Annmarie Harris

### **I. CALL TO ORDER**

Administrator Selig called the first meeting of the Mill Plaza Study Committee to order at 4:04 PM.

### **II. MEMBERSHIP LISTING AND INTRODUCTIONS**

At the request of Administrator Selig, members of the committee and members of the public introduced themselves.

### **III./IV. OVERVIEW OF HISTORY LEADING TO ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMITTEE AND CHARGE FOR THE COMMITTEE**

Administrator Selig provided a brief history of how and why the committee was formed. He explained that the Library Board of Trustees was interested in the Mill Plaza area as a possible future site for the library. This interest resulted in a subsequent meeting between the Town and John Pinto, owner of the Mill Plaza who indicated that he would be willing to evaluate the possible redevelopment of this site. The idea was then brought to the Town Council who, after holding discussions, passed Resolution #2006-25 forming a Mill Plaza Study Committee and establishing a charge for the committee. Administrator Selig read through the charge for committee members.

### **V. REVIEW OF GIS MAPPING AND PANORAMIC PHOTOGRAPHY OF MILL PLAZA**

Jim Campbell, Director of Planning and Community Development, displayed an aerial panoramic photograph of the Mill Plaza area that was provided by Condor Aerial Image System. Mr. Campbell also displayed a map created by means of Geographic Information System (GIS) technology depicting the Mill Plaza site and parcels surrounding the plaza. Members were provided copies of these two images.

### **VI. REVIEW OF RSA 91-A, THE NEW HAMPSHIRE RIGHT TO KNOW LAW**

Administrator Selig provided members with information relative to the Right to Know Law (RSA 91-A) and meetings open to the public. He informed the committee that its

meetings were to operate in an open manner to the public, that agendas were to be prepared and posted 24 hours in advance of each meeting date, and that minutes of each meeting were to be kept and would include who was present, topics covered, actions taken, and decisions reached. He also informed members, in response to a question posed by Julian Smith, that nonpublic sessions could be held in accordance with RSA 91-A. He said that in the committee's case, the only time it would possibly have the occasion to conduct a nonpublic session would be as it relates to land matters.

## **VII. PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE**

Administrator Selig explained that he had contacted four local professionals (William Schoonmaker, Schoonmaker Architects; Nicholas Isaak, working with Mr. Schoonmaker; Walter Rous, and Roberta Woodburn, Woodburn & Company) to determine if they would be interested in creating visuals and working with the Mill Plaza Study Committee to help the committee create a "vision" for the Mill Plaza area. All four expressed an interest and agreed that working through a "team" approach, using each of their individual skills, would be a possibility.

## **VIII. PLAN NEW HAMPSHIRE APPLICATION**

Administrator Selig explained that the Durham Planning Office had submitted a Plan New Hampshire grant application to assist the Town and the Mill Plaza Study Committee in conducting a Charrette, and that the Town hopes to hear whether or not it is eligible for the grant sometime in March 2007. He said if the Town receives the grant, it is anticipated that a Charrette could be conducted sometime in April 2007. Administrator Selig asked Nicholas Isaak, who volunteers with Plan New Hampshire, to explain what the organization does. Mr. Isaak said Plan NH helps communities who may not have a full-time planner or support staff to conduct Charrettes on planning or economic development-related matters.

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Administrator Selig said that prior to selecting the Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary for the committee, he would like for each member to provide a brief description/ reason for their interest in serving as a member on the committee.

**Crawford Mills** said he was asked to sit in for Leslie Schwartz and that he was representing the Historic District Commission (HDC). He said the main concern of the HDC would be in looking out for the interests of the historical aspects of the Mill Plaza area and to ensure that any redevelopment would be coherent with the surrounding neighborhoods.

**Dave Howland** said he felt the potential existed to make the plaza, which is already nice, even better. He felt there was potential to create and expand Main Street and create mixed uses of commercial and residential properties. He said if done right, it could be wonderful for the Town and the neighborhoods surrounding the plaza.

**Thomas Newkirk** said he was interested in the idea of the plaza as a possible site for a new library. He felt that aesthetically it could be made more attractive, and felt that close monitoring for possible encroachment into surrounding neighborhoods would need to be done on any redevelopment of the plaza site.

**Julian Smith** said he hoped for a “revision” of the plaza as opposed to a “vision”. He explained the parcels surrounding the plaza that the Library Trustees would be interested in acquiring for a library site. He also felt there was a real potential for redevelopment of the plaza.

**Michael Davis** said he felt that John Pinto had great vision for the plaza and was willing to work with the Town and that this positive attitude is why he was interested in being on the committee.

**Town Planner Jim Campbell** said he felt there was a lot of potential at the plaza to create more green space and develop a Town Center. He felt that its redevelopment could attract more residents to spend more time and money in their town. He also felt there was an opportunity to protect the brook. He added that traffic analysis would need to be a large part of any redevelopment effort.

**Lorne Parnell** said he had a concern for the economic viability of whatever is proposed for the plaza and felt that input from property owners was imperative and would need to be obtained on a constant basis.

**Chuck Cressy** said that John Pinto’s people had visited Durham to assess the Mill Plaza and that they have already given Mr. Pinto an amount of what it would cost for redevelopment. Mr. Cressy said having a vision is one matter, but if Mr. Pinto cannot make money on his return, it will not happen. He said the community needs to think of this early on to determine what will be the reality of anything going forward.

**Edward Valena** said that the Library Trustees consider the Mill Plaza area as the number one spot for a new library. He said the process for redevelopment of this site will be very complicated but Durham needs to have a success and should strive very hard to make it a success.

**Warren Daniel** said an opportunity existed that does not happen often where the owner is willing to discuss redevelopment opportunities with the Town. He said it has to be market-driven and enhance economic development in the Town, and that the Town needs to be looking to expand retail development as well as residential development. He said that expanding Main Street through the Grange property is also important.

## **IX. SELECTION OF CHAIRPERSON, VICE CHAIR, AND SECRETARY**

***Ed Valena NOMINATED Dave Howland to serve as the committee’s chair. Julian Smith SECONDED the nomination and it PASSED unanimously.***

***Dave Howland NOMINATED Julian Smith to serve as the committee’s vice chair. Ed Valena SECONDED the nomination and it PASSED unanimously.***

***Julian Smith NOMINATED Ed Valena to serve as the committee’s secretary. Dave Howland SECONDED the nomination and it PASSED unanimously.***

## **X. NEXT STEPS**

Administrator Selig provided a brief overview of the next steps needed to move the committee forward including discussion on the project path, gathering information, maps, and photographs as needed, determining uses, density, and build out allowed by the Durham Zoning Ordinance, and determining to what extent the committee believes professional assistance would be beneficial.

Members asked that Jim Campbell provide the necessary maps and any other related information for the next meeting. He was also asked to speak to Plan New Hampshire about placing the Town's consideration for the grant on a "fast track".

Robin Mower, a member of the public in attendance, urged the community to not look at this as a "mall" but as a rejuvenation of a Town Center, and to ask itself what does the Town want instead of a "build it and they will come" mentality. She said the committee should determine the specifics of what kind of character it desires for the community before it begins discussions for the future of the plaza.

Warren Daniel cautioned that the Town should be careful not to micromanage and instead to give consideration to what its needs are from a broader perspective.

Dave Howland said that in moving forward, he would suggest the committee acquire data quickly. This may include assessing what residents think via a survey and conducting a brainstorming session. There was some discussion around the idea of using interns at the University to help with a survey and having a consultant/facilitator attend a meeting.

Dick Houghton, a member of public in attendance, suggested that the committee may find it very informative to review the Community Development Plan that was developed in 1995.

## **XI. NEXT MEETING**

The following were suggested agenda topics for the next meeting:

- ? Provide history of the Mill Plaza property.
- ? Discuss the content of the Community Development Plan.
- ? Discuss zoning of the property as it currently exists.
- ? Hold a round-robin/brainstorming discussion for a vision and invite Jim Varn to facilitate.
- ? Discuss schedule for holding a public hearing.
- ? Discuss deadline for submission of a report to the Town Council.

Consensus was to hold meetings the first and third Wednesdays of each month from 4:00-6:00 PM in the Town Council chambers. The next meeting is scheduled for **Wednesday, March 7, 2007**.

## **XII. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting ADJOURNED at 5:50 PM.

Jennie Berry, Administrative Assistant