D-R-A-F-T

Mill Plaza Study Committee Minutes Wednesday, April 4, 2007 Durham Town Hall – Council Chambers 4:00 PM

Members Present:	Crawford Mills, Thomas Newkirk, Stephen Pesci (sitting in for Douglas Bencks), Julian Smith (Vice Chair), Dave Howland (Chair), Chuck Cressy, Perry Bryant, Ed Valena (Secretary), Lorne Parnell,
Members Absent:	Michael Davis, Edgar Ramos, Deborah Hirsch Mayer, Warren Daniel, Douglas Bencks
Also Present:	Todd Selig (Town Administrator), Jim Campbell (Town Planner); members of the public: Dan Sheehan (Plaza property manager), Robin Mower, Roger Hayden, Bill Schoonmaker,

I. Call to Order

Chair Howland called the meeting to order at 4:05 PM.

II. Comments from the Chair

Chair Howland noted that he had just that day been discharged from the hospital after a short stay for a back injury, and was walking with a cane. He reported on activities since the last meeting. These included: 1) sending news releases to a number of local papers and getting positive feedback from The New Hampshire and Foster's; 2) receiving news that the American Institute of Architects (AIA) had selected the Plaza project over a number of applicants to provide technical support to help bring the project to fruition. He also reported that a similar grant had been applied for with Plan New Hampshire. He noted that the AIA selection committee had visited the town the previous Tuesday and had met with members of the committee, as well as Edgar Ramos, representative of the property owner. He noted that Mr. Ramos also had an opportunity to meet with a number of town officials on his visit. Chair Howland also noted that AIA wished to speak with other applicant communities before making a formal announcement of the grant award. He further spoke on the initial work schedule that was set up for the committee which would likely change with the AIA involvement; and 3) arranging for the public hearing to be held that night at the UNH MUB. He noted that the hearing would be videotaped and spoke of the handout that would be distributed to the public which contained a letter of introduction and the project vision statement.

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Chuck Cressy wondered if it would be a good idea to notify John Pinto, the property owner, concerning the AIA news. Todd Selig, Town Administrator, reported that he had emailed Mr. Pinto and Mr. Ramos concerning this new turn of events.

III. Approval of the Agenda

Julian Smith made a motion to approve the agenda (seconded by Tom Newkirk). which passed unanimously.

IV. Approval of the Minutes

Julian Smith made a motion to approve the minutes of the March 21 meeting which was seconded by Perry Bryant. No amendments were offered to the minutes and the motion passed unanimously.

V. Comments from the Public

Robin Mower spoke to her concern about setbacks from College Brook, and noted that these setbacks should be agreed upon early in the process so that the footprint for the developable area could be determined. She said that College Brook needs an expanded natural buffer area and that the town standard of 25' was not adequate. She noted that many towns call for 100'. She requested that the committee invite an expert on the subject to deliver an educational presentation on the benefits of natural buffers.

There were no other comments from the public at this time.

VI. Report and Discussion about Preparations for Public Hearing on that Evening at the MUB

There was general discussion concerning the handout which contained the project vision statement.

Ed Valena thought there should be more emphasis in the statement on vehicular access and egress issues.

Chair Howland believed that issues such as this could be addressed by various subcommittees, spoke to changes to the vision statement, and thought reference to vehicular traffic "was in there".

Julian Smith spoke to issues of traffic counts and vehicular access - and said that the opening of Chesley Drive was definitely off the table.

Chuck Cressy spoke to the viability of the Plaza today being based on the perception by the public of a "quick in and out". He said that this concept should be a "given" for any plan.

Steve Pesci thought that the word "transit" should be added to the list of vehicular, bicycle, and pedestrian traffic. He also noted that including language that spoke to a

balance of the needs of these different traffic patterns with the existing street network might speak to Mr. Valena's concerns. There was general agreement to both of these suggestions.

Julian Smith spoke to the visual tie-in with Mill Road, as well as UNH and Main Street.

Chair Howland spoke to Mr. Cressy's concept of "givens" and how the scope of the project would change with the involvement of AIA. He spoke to how AIA wishes to determine site capacity in order to determine the maximum amount of development. He again spoke to the role of sub-committees and various subjects on which they could deliver data, e.g. traffic, student housing, etc.

Steve Pesci reported that UNH is currently conducting a transportation study (as is done once every six years) which focuses on student use and residency patterns. He stated that data from this study would be available within three weeks.

Chair Howland spoke to the crappy weather to be expected that evening and mentioned that a second public hearing could be scheduled if there were a poor turnout. He mentioned that the format for the public hearing would include a brief introduction by himself and some historical background of the Plaza by Julian Smith. He again noted that the hearing would be videotaped and subsequently aired on DCAT.

Tom Newkirk opined that it would be best if the vision statement wasn't overplayed at the hearing so that individuals could speak to their own visions.

Perry Bryant wondered if a second public hearing should be scheduled (given the weather) and offered a second option of scheduling some of the regular meetings in the evening hours.

Chair Howland noted that the process has become more fluid with the added involvement of AIA and thought a "wait and see" attitude would be best.

VII. Report and Discussion about Status of AIA and Plan NH Applications It was generally agreed that the AIA issue had been discussed in the Chair's opening remarks; however, there was more on the subject that needed to be covered.

Julian Smith spoke on the need to consult with AIA about their time schedule.

Chair Howland spoke on how the process would change with AIA involvement. Previously, it was thought the process would include coming up with a conceptual plan, presenting that concept to the Council and the property owner, and hopefully the property owner would return with a working plan which would resemble the concept offered by the committee. He noted that he believed that AIA would be more aggressive in working with the property owner/developer in acting as an advocate for the committee's work. He also spoke of the technical support that they might offer.

Lorne Parnell wondered what form this technical support would take.

Bill Schoonmaker, a local architect working on the project and a member of AIA, noted that the group's involvement represents a celebration of the organization's 150th anniversary and includes the involvement of many professional persuasions (engineers, architects, landscape architects, etc.) including such groups as the Jordan Institute (renowned for sustainability and "green building" issues). He noted that they wanted to do something "meaningful", but he really didn't know what they would have to offer.

Chair Howland spoke to the advocacy role of both AIA and the committee.

Chuck Cressy wondered if Brooks Drug Store had been brought into the loop of the committee's work. He thought that a forum for the Plaza merchants might be a good idea.

Jim Campbell spoke to the imminent buy-out of Brooks by Rite-Aid and wondered who the appropriate individuals to contact would be.

Chair Howland urged committee members to talk to their constituencies, i.e. merchants to merchants, and neighborhood residents to neighbors.

Perry Bryant thought that Brooks should be formally contacted.

There was general discussion on the matter. Tom Newkirk spoke to the importance of contacting all of the merchants given the effect of any redevelopment on their livelihoods. Dan Sheehan, Plaza property manager, noted that Brooks' Plaza location was one of the highest producers for the chain. In the end, it was suggested that Todd Selig, Town Administrator, craft a letter to the Plaza merchants explaining the activities of the committee, and Dan Sheehan send a second letter as a representative of the property owner. It was noted that Mr. Selig would cooridinate with Mr. Sheehan concerning contact names and addresses of the merchants.

Chair Howland noted that a representative from AIA would be contacting him within the next week.

VIII. Presentation and Discussion of Photographs of Public Spaces

A slide show had been assembled by Nick Isaak, local architect, of photos of various public spaces submitted by committee members. These included: 1) an in-town supermarket previously owned by Hannafords and located in Kennebunk, Maine; 2) mixed-use modular buildings (some with outdoor seating) located on the

campus of Stanford University; 3) a plaza in Berkley, California which mixed permeable hardscape with trees; 4) a pedestrian mall in Ithaca, New York showing a mix of two and three story buildings, a fountain, and public chess tables; 5) a performer's section of a farmer's market in Ithaca, New York showing granite slabs used for seating; 6) an open air farmer's market in Ithaca, New York showing architecture of the facility and farmers' stalls; 7) a temporary art's festival space in State College, Pennsylvania; 8) a European sidewalk café; 9) a pedestrian mall in Boulder, Colorado; 10) a pedestrian mall in Burlington, Vermont; 11) a temporary farmer's market in Chico, California; 12) a sidewalk café in Geveva, Switzerland sited among 4-5 story mixed-use buildings; and 13) a pedestrian mall in Ithaca, New York which showed a re-used building utilized with first floor retail, second floor professional office, and third/fourth floor residential.

IX. Other Business

There was no other business.

X. Public Comments

Roger Hayden, owner of a number of retail businesses along Main Street, commended the committee on getting started. He spoke to the issue of parking and wondered if a parking facility was in the mix. He wondered if the town would participate in funding the construction of a parking facility. He thought it was important for all Durham merchants to be involved in the process.

Robin Mower spoke to the concept of "givens and constraints" and the importance of keeping a running tally of them as the committee discusses various options. Chuck Cressy spoke to parking needs and how they could be determined for his store by the square footage of the store and the traffic count.

Steve Pesci spoke to the customer base of downtown Durham and wondered how many users were pedestrian students and who, in particular, was supporting the smaller retail and service businesses.

Chuck Cressy spoke to his own business's appeal to the general public and how if he just depended on the student population he would likely fail.

Roger Hayden spoke of conversations held by the Durham Business Association about promoting Durham as a destination town. Mr. Hayden noted that this already exists with the students, their parents, and attendees of various sporting events. He noted the need to entice local residents, as well as the large number of university employees, into the mix.

XII. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:56 PM.

Ed Valena, Secretary