

D-R-A-F-T

Mill Plaza Study Committee Minutes Wednesday, May 23, 2007 Mill Plaza and 110 Gregg Hall, University of New Hampshire 7:30 PM

Members Present: Deborah Hirsch Mayer (attended reconvened meeting but not the Site Walk) , Crawford Mills, Thomas Newkirk, Douglas Bencks, Julian Smith (Vice Chair), Dave Howland (Chair), Chuck Cressy, Edgar Ramos, Warren Daniel.

Members Absent: Michael Davis, Ed Valena, Perry Bryant, Lorne Parnell. (Valena, Bryant, and Parnell participated in Site Walk).

Also Present: *From AIA:* Pat Field, Mike Castagna, Patricia Sherman, Maura Adams, *Members of local architects group:* Walter Rous, Bill Schoonmaker. *Members of the public:* Lorraine Murphy, Greg Grigsby, Dan Sheehan, Ed Garcia, Marty Coyle, Joe Friedman, Mary Robertson, Diane Wood, John Carroll, Sarah Mayer, Doug Greene. Nick Issak.

1. Call to Order—Welcome from Chairman

Dave Howland welcomed those assembled for the Site Walk and explained the purpose of the Site Walk.

2. Approval of Agenda

Julian Smith added an item to the published agenda—a time for reaction to the Site Walk. The amended agenda was moved by Crawford Mills, seconded by Julian Smith and approved unanimously.

3. Site Walk

Julian Smith conducted the Site Walk, explaining the history of the site and the land ownership of property adjoining the site. The Site Walk concluded at 7:10 with everyone invited to the reconvened meeting in Gregg Hall that would begin at 7:30.

4. Meeting Reconvened in Gregg Hall.

Chair Howland reconvened the meeting at 7:30. He handed out copies of the Vision Statement, minutes of the previous meeting, and copies of the Town Council resolution forming the Study Group. He explained the purpose of the evening session, and noted that the agenda had been approved (before the walkthrough) with one addition item—a time for response to the Mill Plaza Site Walk.

He welcomed representatives from the AIA, and everyone present briefly introduced himself or herself.

5. Responses to the Site Walk

Chair Howland invited reactions to the Site Walk, beginning with AIA representatives and committee members.

Mike Castagna—So many possibilities. The ultimate project will greatly enhance the property. It will be a very comprehensive project.

Patricia Sherman—She has a background in site evaluation. Impressed with the natural features. Impressed with the beauty of the site, the quietness, and trees. Need to preserve natural environment and still help create a vital site for business. The site brings everything you want (university connection, natural beauty, etc). Very pleased with the site.

Maura Adams: How can you make more out of what you already have there? Can there be more attractive structures using what is already there? How can you make that possible?

Doug Bencks: Mill Plaza is a wonderful resource, vital to day-to-day life of town and university. Other towns would like these assets in a downtown. There is the potential to make this a special place—this is in the interest of the university.

Warren Daniel: Never walked the space before. Struck by the opportunity for creative work and by how well the landscaping has been done.

Crawford Mills: Impressed by the beauty and space of the Plaza.

Chair Howland opened the discussion to the public at this point.

Walter Rous: First time he walked the perimeter. Impressed by the texture of the perimeter, the outcropping of trees—and the contrast with the two big “things” of the Plaza, the buildings and parking lot. Would like to see a design that meshes them better.

John Carroll: One source of ugliness in the Plaza—the parking lot. Need to pay attention to role and visibility of motor vehicles. Need varied transportation options including public transportation. Need to consider the energy realities of the future.

Lorraine Murphy: Notes there is currently one place for access and egress from Plaza. Won't the potential development be driven by how traffic is handled? Only so

much can be done until this is figured out. Hopes the AIA can look at this without being limited by recent debate on the issue.

Chuck Cressy: In response to John Carroll, emphasizes the need for automobile traffic for a successful supermarket.

6. Approval of the Minutes

Tom Newkirk moved that the minutes of the May 3 meeting be approved. Julian Smith seconded and the minutes were approved by the committee.

7. Discussion of Collaboration with AIA

Patrick Field moderated this portion of the meeting which focused for the explanation of four documents key to the combined efforts of the Town Council, the Mill Plaza Committee, and the AIA. Julian Smith began by giving background on the Town Council resolution creating the Mill Plaza Committee. He noted the goal of increasing taxable property, creating a community gathering space, and perhaps developing parcels adjacent to the Mill Plaza. He mentioned a letter from John Pinto in which he gave support for this effort. After this brief presentation, Patrick Field asked if there were any “back stories” concerning this resolution. Warren Daniel mentioned the history of the library moving to Mill Plaza. Crawford Mills mentioned the difficulty many developers had with building projects in Durham. Chuck Cressy noted that his current expansion of his store went well, with approvals allowing him to open on schedule. Warren Daniel said that in the past people who are in favor of economic development have been “left out of the system”—leading to one of the highest tax rates in the state.

Next Dave Howland explained the genesis of the committee’s Vision Statement: the initial brainstorming in the committee followed by public comment, and then further deliberations by the committee. He noted that the Vision Statement cites other relevant documents such as the Durham Master Plan and the policy statements of the AIA.

Patricia Sherman described the AIA 150 project, emphasizing the importance of building a win-win consensus among all stakeholders. AIA 150 is committing \$100,000 to the project. The hope is that this project could serve as a model for other communities to follow. She was asked about how the inclusions of national chains in a new Plaza might affect development. She responded that in Freeport, Maine, McDonalds dropped it arches. It is in the interest of national chains to accommodate the community; this leads to quicker approvals.

Chuck Cressy stressed the importance of paying attention to other commercial development around Durham, such as the new Hannaford supermarket on Rt. 108 outside of Dover. Patricia Sherman responded that there would be a careful site analysis, and planners will consult documents like the UNH Master Plan. This pro-

active approach can mean the ability to pick stores for the new Plaza—and develop a project that makes money as well.

Patrick Field asked her to say something about resources that AIA 150 might tap. Patricia Sherman noted that they would call upon building architects, landscape architects, traffic engineers, and others. Together they will gather information on Durham and come up with two or three approaches so that the committee and community will know what can be done.

Warren Daniel asked about the role of local architects who have been working on the Plaza project. Patricia Sherman answered that the details of coordinating with this group have not been worked out, but AIA 150 wants to work with all those involved in the project.

Patrick Field noted that AIA 150 will be working with a large pool of professionals around the state and will come up with a work plan. Patricia Sherman added that this plan will begin to set some specific dates. Bill Schoonmaker said that the small group of local architects has been meeting and is about 1-2 meetings away from coming up with something useful. Dave Howland concluded that work needs to be done to mesh the teams working on the project.

Maura Adams next passed out a handout specifying the LEED for Neighborhood Development standards and briefly explained the certification process. Crawford Mills asked what benefit the community gains from this certification. Patricia Sherman explained that certification responds to community concerns about sustainability; it is advantageous for the developer; and it can save money.

Doug Bencks explained the efforts at the University of New Hampshire to achieve sustainability in building projects such as James Hall, where UNH is considering LEED certification. He expressed the university's willingness to work toward LEED standards.

Chuck Cressy asked whether the cost of going for LEED certification was higher. Doug Bencks said that it depended on the starting point of the project. For some projects there is a fairly quick payoff. He mentioned the up front work on the renovation of DeMerritt Hall. Patricia Sherman described one of her last development projects at the Merrimack County Nursing Home where geo-thermal energy was used. It was possible to borrow money for the installation and pay back the loan through savings.

Greg Gribsby asked about the feasibility of requiring LEEDS certification. Maura Adams said that there are up front costs that can be paid back in the long run and that some communities are mandating energy efficiency (it was mentioned that Epping, NH has mandated LEED certification). John Carroll mentioned he is involved in the LEED certification for the James Hall renovation and there are points for having a bus stop.

8. Scheduling of Future Meetings

Dave Howland noted that the committee needed to set up a regular meeting time. He suggested the first and third Wednesday of the month from 4:30-6:30. Patrick Field suggested that we might have another public meeting after the work plan is formulated. This schedule was moved by Crawford Mills, seconded by Julian Smith and passed unanimously.

Patrick Field raised the question of expectations for future progress. Warren Daniel noted that the expectations have changed to a longer time line. He warned that the town likes to drag things out. Chuck Cressy said that there was the expectation that there would be a report and that it would be important for John Pinto to know about the longer time frame we were contemplating. Edgar Ramos assured the committee that John Pinto is comfortable with the work schedule.

Warren Daniel asked how the AIA felt about the time line. Mike Castagna said that AIA's expectations have changed —originally it was 18 months, but there has been considerable up front work. Now the expectation is for one year. The time line will be set in the next six weeks. Warren Daniel said he didn't want to rush things, but reiterated that things drag out in Durham. Doug Bencks asked, "Twelve months to what?" Patricia Sherman said that their expectation was that in 8-12 months there would be a plan, with the owner, a developer, and the community "on board."

Bill Schoonmaker said that perhaps at some point, after the plan is developed, the Mill Plaza Study Committee might back out of the picture. Crawford Mills said that he didn't think the committee should be out of the process.

9. Other Business

None.

7. Final Round of Public Comments.

John Carroll: Advocated mix in residential housing, including elderly and workforce housing to create a good downtown living situation. Crawford Mills said that he couldn't find a lot of examples of mixed housing and Patricia Sherman admitted that was the case. Doug Bencks said that college towns were doing some interesting mixed residency developments.

Bill Schoonmaker: Stressed the importance of wide participation. This is a unique opportunity with tremendous potential. Public input is important. There are lots of areas where there will need to be compromise, where everyone will have to give a bit.

Lorraine Murphy: Asked about expectations for reporting back to the Town Council. Dave Howland answered that it will take time to mesh efforts with the AIA and come back with a work plan. The depth of the planning has changed and we will need more time.

Patricia Sherman: The AIA has contracted a public relations firm to get the word out about this project.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15.

Submitted by Tom Newkirk