

D-R-A-F-T

Mill Plaza Study Committee Minutes Wednesday, June 20, 2007 Durham Town Hall – Council Chambers 4:30 PM

Members Present: Deborah Hirsch Mayer, Crawford Mills, Douglas Bencks, Julian Smith (Vice Chair), Dave Howland (Chair), Chuck Cressy, Ed Valena (Secretary), Lorne Parnell, Warren Daniel, Perry Bryant, Thomas Newkirk

Members Absent: Mark Henderson, Edgar Ramos

Also Present: Patricia Sherman, Patrick Field, Michael Castagna, John Merkle, Maura Adams (Representatives of NHAIA); Members of the public: Robin Mower, Bill Schoonmaker, Diane Woods, Janice Aviza

I. Call to Order

Chair Howland called the meeting to order at 4:30 PM.

II. Welcome from the Chair

Chair Howland reported that the meeting would be live on DCAT for the first time and gave an overview of the upcoming meeting. He noted that this would be a “roll up the sleeves” meeting and that the group would get “down to the nitty gritty”. He observed three important upcoming agenda items which included 1) identifying stakeholder groups and contact people on the committee who could get in touch with these stakeholders, 2) setting parameters for the design teams including the boundaries of the site, and 3) addressing the draft statement on fairness and transparency. Chair Howland asked Patrick Field if he had any opening comments. Mr. Field did not.

III. Approval of the Agenda

Julian Smith moved that the agenda be approved as presented and was seconded by Crawford Mills. The motion passed unanimously.

IV. Approval of the Minutes

Julian Smith made a motion to approve the minutes of the June 6 meeting as presented and was seconded by Perry Bryant. Patricia Sherman noted that in the future “AIA” should be referred to as “NHAIA”. The motion passed unanimously.

V. Comments from the Public

There were no comments from the public at this time.

VI. Discussion of Stakeholder Outreach Efforts

Chair Howland distributed a list of stakeholder groups (including “sub”groups and members) to the committee for review. He explained the process of contacting these groups individually for private conversations about their hopes and fears of a Plaza redevelopment. The groups include (in no order of importance): 1) Town staff, 2) NHAIA150, 3) Durham local architects, 4) Mill Plaza Study Committee, 5) Planning Board, 6) Town Council 7) Property owners, 8) Leaseholders, 9) Durham Public Library, 10) Ecology/Conservation interests, 11) Business/Local economy, 12) Abutters, 13) Faculty neighborhood, 14) Civic groups, 15) Housing interests, 16) Historic/Heritage interests, 17) Cycling interests, 18) UNH, and 19) Schools and youth groups.

Ed Valena asked if the purpose of the process was to widen the range of the list or to make it more manageable. Patrick Field responded that he wanted to make sure the list was complete, and then possibly compress it for the private conversations.

Patricia Sherman wondered if the Zoning Board of Adjustment should be included. Ed Valena thought that given the quasi-judicial nature of that board, it would be inappropriate to include them as stakeholders. Patrick Field thought they could be “astericked” for possible future involvement.

Deborah Hirsh Mayer believed it would be a good idea to involve the Friends of the Library, possibly the chairs.

Crawford Mills thought it would be wise to widen the “Housing” group to include the Workforce Housing Coalition of the Seacoast and the New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority.

It was thought that senior groups should be included. The Silver Squares and the Active Retirement Association were mentioned.

Patricia Sherman wondered if the town had a Rotary and a recreation committee, and if so, they should be informed of the project.

Patrick Field reiterated the desire to reach out to these groups in small conversational meetings to find out what they might hope for in a Plaza redevelopment. During the course of the following conversation, committee members were assigned groups to contact to schedule these private meetings to be held with Mr. Field and committee members.

There was discussion of how various groups could be tied together. It was determined that the Durham Business Association and the Durham, It’s Where U Live group would be a likely combination. The Economic Development Committee would be met with separately.

There was discussion on meetings with the general residential neighborhood (specifically, the “Faculty” neighborhood). Deborah Hirsch Mayer wondered if abutters might have concerns greater than the wider neighborhood.

Patricia Sherman spoke to housing. She believed it was important to understand the housing program in a possible redevelopment and to widen the view.

There was discussion on transportation. It was decided that “Cycling” might be incorporated under a larger transportation topic which would include busses. Bill Schoonmaker thought “transportation” might not be a “group” at all, but rather a “topic”. Patrick Field responded to see how this issue is being dealt with “down the road”, and, if need be, the “topic” might need to be reconvened as a “group”.

There was more discussion on housing, specifically on the Church Hill apartments and how residents of these buildings are pedestrian visitors to the Plaza.

Ed Valena believed that the Durham Historic Association should be included in the Historic/Heritage interest group given members attachment to buildings in the District, and particularly to the Grange.

Patricia Sherman spoke again to the importance of getting people involved early in the process. She particularly spoke of the Planning Board and how it is typical for this board to respond to projects following their formal applications. Patrick Field wondered how to meet with members of the Planning Board without it being construed as a public meeting. Lorne Parnell thought it would be best to get on the agenda for an upcoming meeting, possibly at a work session scheduled for the following week.

Julian Smith pointed out that there is a weekly staff meeting for department heads and this might be the best time to update the town staff.

Chuck Cressy wondered when these stakeholder meetings would be held. Patrick Field responded that he was open and that the meetings could occur during the day or in the evenings. He said the meetings would be conducted in a style appropriate to the size of the group and hoped to have a central location available to hold them.

VII. Discussion of Draft Design Team Parameters

Patricia Sherman presented the *Draft Parameters for the Design Team*. She stated up front that the goal is to “create an actual development through an open collaborative process” of all the stakeholders and defined the success of the process as a “permitted project backed by the owner and a developer that meet the community’s goals and is slated for construction by 2009”. She noted the criteria were separated into three categories: qualitative, quantitative, and economic and spoke to these individual categories. She noted that the qualitative criteria directly spoke to the *Vision Statement* (adopted in May) and to AIA’s principles (including a Carbon Challenge). Quantitative criteria included addressing opportunities and

limitations of the site (natural features, utilities, transportation, parking, neighborhood context, and zoning). She spoke to the type of spaces that might be constructed (retail, office, residential, municipal). She offered how the size of the multi-family residential space and the form of ownership (rental income vs. condominium) were independent issues. Economic criteria would be analyzed by RKG Associates on a confidential basis and pro formas would be run for various design scenarios. She emphasized that John Pinto's (the property owner) financial stake would be kept private and that "rules for engagement" with him would be set in a future meeting. She further noted that pro formas on the Town's costs and future revenues would also be run for different design schemes.

Ed Valena mentioned the existence of a \$475,000 UDAG fund and how it might come into play with the project.

Patricia Sherman then spoke to the boundaries of the redevelopment site. She related a map which highlighted the neighborhood with two lines:

1. The Blue Line. This area includes the Plaza property, the wooded backland piece owned by Perry Bryant (on the south side of College Brook), the Kyreages properties (including the Red Tower), and all of the properties on the south side of Main Street to and including Mill Road to the current entrance. Ms. Sherman spoke to how these properties would be the most impacted by a possible redevelopment and how they might play a part in such a project.
2. The Black Line. This area denoted the context analysis of the project – an area that would be impacted to a lesser extent - and included some of the faculty area, the churches, the post office, and most of the downtown shopping area.

Julian Smith noted how the Plaza really was the heart of the downtown.

Ed Valena wished that it be made plain that the Blue Line didn't demarcate an urban renewal scheme where buildings are razed; rather, it represented an opportunity for settings of valued historic buildings to be improved.

Patricia Sherman noted that the site analysis would be complete by July 18. She reiterated the importance of agreeing on information going into the process to create the best consensus later on.

Chair Howland noted how the regular July 4 meeting would be delayed to July 11 and, given the absence of himself and Patrick Field, the meeting would be co-chaired by Julian Smith and Patricia Sherman. He also spoke to the July 18 evening public hearing at 7PM and how it might be best for the committee to meet from 4:30 to 6:00 beforehand to organize the presentation. This was generally agreed to.

VIII. Discussion of the Fairness and Transparency Statement

Chair Howland spoke to the notion that by definition, as stakeholders, committee members may have conflicts of interests. But he added that members – whose collective interests give the committee its strength and depth – should not have to recuse themselves from votes. This is especially true, he said, because the entire committee is advisory to the Town Council. He reported that Town Administrator Todd Selig agreed with this point of view. To clarify this issue for the committee and the public, Chair Howland presented a “Statement on Fairness and Transparency”, which was prepared by Patrick Field, and edited by Mr. Selig, Chair Howland, and Julian Smith. Chair Howland noted that the most important section of this document was the “no surprises” clause which would keep everyone on the committee on the up and up.

The document read as follows:

This three-part statement is intended to provide a measure of clarity for committee members and the public on the confluence of members’ personal interests in the future of the site and their responsibility to participate fairly and openly on the study committee.

1. The members of the Mill Plaza Study Committee have been selected because they represent the range of affected interests regarding the current and potential future uses of this site. Thus, committee members are expected to have personal, professional, and financial stakes in the issues at hand.
2. In order to ensure a fair and transparent process, Mill Plaza Committee members are encouraged to share their interests, concerns, and ideas as openly as possible.
3. To the greatest extent possible, Committee members are encouraged to let other members know of pending events or actions that may directly affect the Mill Plaza Committee planning effort and to avoid any surprises that may adversely affect both the relationships among members as well as the substantive planning underway.

Ed Valena moved that the document should be approved as presented and was seconded by Perry Bryant. Crawford Mills wished to amend the language of the document and exchange the word “encouraged” to “asked”. This amendment was seconded by Julian Smith and it passed unanimously. The amended motion then passed unanimously.

IX. Discussion of New Secretary Hire

It was acknowledged by the committee that the secretary had preformed a superhuman job of taking notes on conversation of a truly ragtag group. However,

increased kryptonite in the atmosphere would not allow him to continue at this task. Chair Howland and Patrick Field both offered to remedy this situation with some fresh blood by the next regular meeting.

X. Other Business

Lorne Parnell reiterated his intention to get the Plaza Committee on the agenda for the Planning Board's work session to be held on Wednesday, June 27 at 6PM. NHAIA representatives stated that they would be able to attend a meeting on that date.

XI. Public Comment

Robin Mower commented on the quantitative criteria and how the wetlands conversation should include reference to buffer areas. She noted that some abutters were absent from the area (specifically one on sabbatical) and wondered if they could be contacted about events via email. She further noted that while some neighbors were in close proximity and in clear view of the Plaza, they were not included on the abutter's list. Concerning feedback to the committee, she said she knew of people with strong opinions on the topic and wondered if they could email comments in. Chair Howland responded that such comments were welcome and spoke to how conversations with the public would be held in a public forum. Ms. Mower spoke again to buffers and wondered if they were grandfathered. Patricia Sherman referred to site-specific permitting from the DES and the demanding nature of that process.

There were no other public comments.

XII. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:11 PM.

Ed Valena, Secretary