



Town of Reading Meeting Minutes

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By Town Clerk GP at 10:34 am, Oct 08, 2024

Board - Committee - Commission - Council:

Community Planning and Development Commission

Date: 2024-8-26

Time: 7:00 PM

Building: Town Hall

Location: Hybrid Meeting – Zoom and Select Board Meeting Room

Address: 16 Lowell Street

Session: Open Session

Purpose: Hybrid Meeting

Version: Approved

Attendees: **Members In person:** John Weston, Chair; Tom Armstrong, Associate; Heather Clish, Secretary; Hillary Mateev

Members Not Present: Gaetano Manganiello; John Arena

Others Present in person: Andrew MacNichol, Community Development Director; Olivia Knightly, Senior Planner; Tony D'Arezzo; Karen Herrick, Select Board Member; Marrienne Downing; Carlo Bacci, Select Board Chair

Present on Zoom: Laura Stella

Minutes Respectfully Submitted By: Olivia Knightly

Topics of Discussion:

MEETING HELD IN THE SELECT BOARD ROOM AND REMOTELY VIA ZOOM

Mr. Weston called the meeting to order at 7:03 PM.

Mr. MacNichol gave an overview of the hybrid meeting procedures.

MBTA Communities Discussion

The board discussed the tentative public hearing schedule before Town Meeting in November. Mr. MacNichol stated that he would like to hold two public hearings.

Marrienne Downing, 13 Hunter Drive, provided the dates of the school open houses.

Concept 1 Existing Developments

Mr. MacNichol provided an overview of the proposed allowances and geography of the first concept.

Mr. Weston stated that during the public hearings the board will be reviewing the zoning language that is drafted. Mr. Weston asked if the minimum lot size would change in the Downtown and Mr. MacNichol stated that the lot size would remain as it exists today and that there is no expansion to the downtown district in this concept, as it already allows multifamily by right.

Mr. Weston stated that in the areas with existing housing developments we are achieving unit capacity by increasing density.



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Mr. Armstrong stated that this concept is not a preferred concept because it is marginally over the unit capacity required and believes the two outlying areas containing existing developments could be rejected by the state.

Ms. Clish agreed, stating that zoning at the proposed density leaves the area open for more development than what people may believe is possible.

Mr. Weston said that he is interested in developing the concept further to better understand the potential for each of the properties. He added that he cannot approve a zoning amendment under the impression that it is not going to happen. Mr. Weston stated that he is not as concerned about this concept getting rejected and having to go back to the drawing board since the Town continues to make an effort toward compliance.

The board agreed that not changing allowances in the downtown is a benefit of this concept.

Mr. Weston asked if affordability changes in the Downtown and Mr. MacNichol stated no, it will remain as exists.

Ms. Clish asked why the concept may be rejected by the state, and Mr. Armstrong noted that the unit capacity is close to the minimum unit requirement for compliance. Mr. MacNichol stated that should the state find reason to eliminate some unit capacity then the concept would fall out of compliance, but that both proposed areas meet the law's requirements.

Concept 2 Downtown and Eastern Gateway

Mr. MacNichol provided an overview of the allowances and geography of the second concept.

Mr. Armstrong stated that this concept is not in his top preferences because there is no existing residential use in the proposed area. He added that environmental justice is a consideration here, citing the location of the railroad and the DPW.

Ms. Clish also noted the location of the railroad tracks as not ideal for residential development, and that the rate of development in this area would occur at a faster rate, which contradicts preferences heard at town meeting. Ms. Clish added that there may be other uses that could be planned here outside of MBTA Communities.

Ms. Mateev stated that there is no easy access into and out of the development area which raises concern for the flow of traffic. She stated that vehicles would have to cross the Ash Street intersection to access the MBTA Hub which feels dangerous and that the train tracks limit movement in the area.

Mr. Weston stated that the MBTA Communities is not the right tool to develop the area, and he is not confident that by right zoning would result in a neighborhood scale. He expressed that the area does not feel like a good location for housing development, citing an increase in vehicle traffic.

Concept 3 Downtown and Main Street

Mr. MacNichol provided an overview of the allowances and geography of the third concept.

Mr. Armstrong said that this is in his top two preferences, and noted that there are some negatives, citing limitations to crossing Main Street. Mr. Armstrong stated that the Home



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Goods area is more car oriented, but there is a bus line that goes through the area. Mr. MacNichol corrected that there is no MBTA bus line servicing the area. Mr. Armstrong said that the Downtown fits the intentions of the law, while the Home Goods area is outside of the downtown perimeter but may accommodate rentals or condos.

Ms. Clish stated that the Main Street area seems amenable to residential construction and is connected and walkable to downtown. She added that the Home Goods area is in a different school district with a lower student population. Ms. Clish stated that the sidewalks are in good condition and Main Street is becoming more walkable.

Mr. Weston stated that this is the type of development that has occurred on Main Street, whether by special permit or by right and it will continue to occur. He stated that this concept would include zoning full parcels and un-splitting lots along Main Street.

Mr. Weston asked if the proposed zoning would become a new base zone and whether the existing by-right residential and commercial uses would be incorporated. Mr. MacNichol said that the zone could overlay the area and maintain the underlying Business A allowances as they exist. The overlay would be the only way to unsplit lots while providing protection for the underlying Business A. Mr. MacNichol said that this could create conflict with mixed use having different permissions in the overlay and the underlying zoning.

Ms. Clish asked if the zoning would be allowing multiple types of uses by right and if mixed use would still be allowed by special permit. Mr. MacNichol said that he is unsure at this time.

The board continued to discuss how best to represent the mixed-use allowances in the zoning.

Ms. Mateev agreed with the comments provided by the board on the concept.

Concept 4 Transitional Residential

Mr. MacNichol provided an overview of the allowances and geography of the fourth concept.

Mr. Armstrong said that this is a second viable option, citing that there are three parks close by, sidewalks, schools, transit, and other amenities. He believes that this is the concept likely to promote the slowest development, as the lots are smaller and owned by individual property owners.

Ms. Clish stated that she is hesitant on this concept. She stated she is worried about the impacts of multi-family housing and inequities that may occur for those who may not be able to develop their properties the same way due to non-conforming lots. Ms. Clish added that access to parks is more difficult than it appears in this area. She stated that more gradual development is preferred, and that the Town should make use of other tools to develop housing in this area. Ms. Mateev said that she agrees with Ms. Clish on seeking alternative tools to develop housing in the area.

Mr. Weston reiterated that the MBTA law is not the right tool to achieve other housing goals and that there will be other opportunities that will provide more fitting development.

Mr. Weston opened for public comment.

Marianne Downing, 13 Hunter Drive, asked if the South Main option could keep the Downtown the same as paper compliance and whether another area could be added to



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maintain the Downtown as it exists. She added that Reading has done more with 40R compared to other towns and that this should be preserved.

Mr. Armstrong stated that the total unit capacity count of 1,636 in this concept is high and could come down. Mr. MacNichol said that a buffer of 200 units is necessary to ensure unit capacity requirements are met.

Karin Herrick, 9 Dividence Road, asked if an area further up north Main Street could be added to accommodate more housing.

The board continued to have a discussion about the concepts and asked questions about the potential to combine the Main Street Concept with the Existing Development Concept.

Ms. Clish asked if the board wants to bring two concepts to Town Meeting. Mr. Weston stated that they can enter the public hearings with two options and see how the concepts develop through discussion and potentially the solution may be combining portions of two concepts into one for Town Meeting.

Mr. Armstrong asked for clarification on the Downtown density allowances. Mr. Weston said that the zoning for the Downtown Smart Growth District allows variety through the waiver process and it is difficult to compare the potential of the proposed concept with the existing zoning.

Referencing the July 31 presentation and public forum, Ms. Clish stated that the existing development areas don't provide affordability, housing variety or incremental growth, so there are choices remaining. Mr. MacNichol said that affordability in these areas could develop through the public hearing process.

Carlo Bacci, 494 Main Street - Chair of the Select Board, spoke as a member of the public. He asked the board about the potential for paper compliance option being accepted by the state and whether a second concept will be proposed. Mr. Weston stated that two public hearings will occur, and the board will recommend one concept to go on the warrant for Town Meeting, but there is the possibility for two concepts to be brought to Town Meeting. Mr. Bacci said he is hoping the board recommends a preferred option and, if necessary, a backup alternative. Mr. Weston stated that he believes the state would provide additional time for the Town to amend their proposal if it is initially rejected. Mr. Bacci stated that the Town needs people to live in Downtown for it to thrive and that there is opportunity for that. He added that he would rather have downtown change than see neighborhoods change.

Mr. Armstrong stated that the bylaw should say that regulations will not go into effect until the state approves the zoning. He also asked that to condition that lots cannot be combined. Mr. MacNichol said that the conjoining of lots cannot be restricted but they can prescribe a unit cap instead of a density-based unit count. Mr. Armstrong added that they should aim to get the highest number of affordable units as possible.

Tony D'Arezzo, 130 John Street, cited the MAPC development feasibility score for the Summit Towers property as 6 out of 100 and he does not believe the state will allow these areas to be included in the MBTA community requirements.

Mr. Weston stated that all zoning acted upon by Town Meeting is reviewed by the state to ensure it complies with 40A and that they will review the MBTA proposal for general zoning compliance as well as 3A compliance. Mr. Weston asked what happens if the zoning proposal is rejected. Mr. MacNichol stated that only a few proposals have been reviewed by



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the state at this time and has not seen any get rejected. Ms. Clish stated that this point speaks to Mr. Armstrong's request that the zoning not go into effect unless it passes 3A.

Mr. D'Arezzo referenced the Downtown and South Main options and asked about the affordability requirements of 12.5% for developments with 13 or more units. Mr. MacNichol said that this was generated through a model analysis and the goal is to reach a threshold of 10 units. Mr. D'Arezzo asked the board to not exclude the transitional residential area, citing large community support for the concept. He added that no single-family lots were developed under 40R, and that under normal circumstances developers will not be paying in excess to consolidate lots.

The board discussed the meeting motion and directed planning staff for the upcoming public hearing.

Ms. Clish made a motion to notice a public hearing and for staff to prepare background materials for concept 1 Existing Developments and concept 3 the Downtown Smart Growth District plus Main Street. Ms. Mateev seconded the motion, and it was approved 4-0-0 (Clish, Mateev, Weston, Armstrong).

Mr. Armstrong stated that he would like to explore possibility to modify the Home Goods area if possible.

Marianne Downing, 13 Hunter Drive, asked if both concepts could be presented at Town Meeting, with South Main Street as option A with a modified Downtown and South Main Street Option B that includes an unmodified Downtown and incorporates other areas.

Mr. MacNichol asked if mixed use controls should be incorporated during the public hearing process. Mr. Weston stated that a commercial and mixed-use opportunity should be maintained and incorporated at some point to ensure that this is an option.

Ms. Clish stated that housing and commercial uses would be allowed by right, but mixed-use would be by special permit. She added that they do not want to disincentive mixed-use by requiring a special permit. Mixed use should remain as a desirable use.

Mr. MacNichol reviewed the objectives and proposed allowances for the proposed bylaws. The board continued to discuss the logistics of the public hearings.

Adjournment

Ms. Clish made a motion to adjourn at 9:07, and it was seconded by Ms. Mateev. It was approved 4-0-0 (Clish, Mateev, Weston, Armstrong)

Documents Reviewed at the Meeting:

- Concept Maps
- MBTA Communities Forum Presentation, dated 7/31/24
- Compliance Analysis, dated 7/8/24

