

**Town of Lenox**  
**Lenox Planning Board**

**August 25th, 2020 at 6:34 p.m. Via Zoom**

**Members Present:** Kate McNulty-Vaughan (KMV), Pam Kueber (PK), Lauryn Franzoni (LF), Tom Delasco (TD), Jim Harwood (JH)

Gwen Miller (GM): Land Use Dir. And Planner

**Documents:**

**August 25, 2020 Planning Board Agenda**

**February 11, 2020 Executive Session Minutes**

**March 10, 2020 Executive Session Minutes**

**July 28, 2020 Meeting Minutes**

**August 11, 2020 Meeting Minutes**

**Resumption of Aug. 25 meeting following Executive Session**

Planning Bd. announced that it had approved the release of Minutes for Executive Sessions on Feb. 11 and March 10th in response to public documents request.

Land Use Dir. GM updated the Planning Bd. on the status of private litigation regarding the 114 Main St. ("Windrose") proposal and what would be reviewed by the ZBA in response to the court's remand.

**Minutes:** TD moved to approve, seconded by PK, **July 28 Minutes** as amended. Approved (4-0-1) by rollcall vote: AYES: PK, TD, JH, LF; KMV abstains due to absence.

TD moved to approve, seconded by KMV, **August 11 Minutes** as amended. Approved (3-0-2) by rollcall vote: AYES: TD, LF, KMV; JH and PK abstain due to absence.

**Priorities for 2021 Fiscal Year:**

TD summarized members' conversation from 8/11 meeting, first noting ongoing projects: sign bylaw, impacts of religious and educational uses, update of Master Plan, affordable housing initiatives, review of Inclusionary zoning and Great Estates bylaws.

Conversation centered around a long view of the future of the Niagara Mill in Lenox Dale, possibly discussing with Tn. Mgr. Chris Ketchen, in the future, the idea of utilizing a Redevelopment Authority for planning and oversight.

PK asked LF to explain what she had meant about "filters," and asked if the PB would want to dive into selecting criteria to help set priorities. LF thought it would be good to have filters or lenses through

which the PB would prioritize work going forward. For instance: to bring local zoning into compliance with state or federal law would be a very good filter.

JH said he had similar thoughts as LF of the “broad mission” of the PB when he joined the Board. He commented on the parking situation since Covid-19, stating that he found the parking requirements to be “handcuffs,” and noted there had been great vitality in the downtown area even with fewer people around due to the pandemic. He thought the Planning Board could look ten years ahead and see how to maintain the vitality and density that has been catalyzed by the relaxing of parking requirements and conversion of eyesore or under-utilized parking lots into outdoor dining sites.

JH reminded the Board of the Rob Akroyd plan to create an internal pathway from Walker Street to Franklin Street. He also mentioned the bandwidth issue for both internet and cell service: important services the town needs to provide.

KMV asked if everybody thinks the current use of private property and public property for outdoor dining and music has broad support, if retailers are as pleased as the restaurant businesses, and how to gauge the public and overall community response. TD noted that some years ago the idea of picnic tables downtown was met with horror.

GM suggested that the reconvening of the Master Plan Committee and its community outreach could provide a means of garnering public opinion. LF noted that private companies and non-profits are using this time to consider the “Covid Challenge” and PB members discussed how to get a sense of the benefits of Covid-induced downtown changes and what this activity means to the community in terms of attracting younger folks, and other impacts.

GM advised the Board to keep going with Master Planning because this is an example of why towns have plans—so they aren’t derailed or thrown off course by emergencies or dramatic changes in conditions. She also suggested that they could launch a survey available by QR code or link placed at restaurants and outdoor gathering spaces. PB members discussed town debates about signage and parking, use of a shuttle bus, and the inner pathway site visit by the Board. PK spoke of work with the Chamber (R. Murray) and Finance Committee (E. Morss) on improving the tourist economy by capacitating what the Town has now by expanding the “shoulder seasons.”

Generally Planning Board members recognized that -- “pandemic planning” -- was providing energy and enthusiasm for sweeping change, and an opportunity and consensus among community folks, and public and private interests to build on this vitality. And to welcome remote workers and families -- to build up, in LF’s words -- “the mid-level worker who can afford to live here.” TD and other members noted the persistence of certain conditions that continue to provide challenges: limited bus service, overall population decline, and loss of historic industries and jobs.

LF indicated that those challenges are the PB’s mission (with BOS sponsor?) – to convene the public conversation with Lenox citizens on their fears and views on these challenges.

PK suggested that members consider this discussion of priorities, rank the top 5, and send those on to TD and LF to compile for discussion at our next meeting.

The meeting was adjourned by consensus at 8:15pm.