

Hamilton Development Corporation
December 6, 2014

The Hamilton Development Corporation met at Hamilton Wenham Public Library at 2 p.m. on Saturday, December 6, 2014 with Brian Stein, Bill Gisness, Anthony Nickas and Rick Mitchell present. Planning and Inspections Director Patrick Reffett and DPW Director Bill Redford also present.

Call to order

Brian Stein called the downtown planning session to order at 2:05 p.m., introduced the HDC, gave an overview of Corporation and its intent to grow the downtown economically, and summarized what occurred at the first planning session about height, uses, density, and parking. Also how business district design guidelines would be introduced in preparation for approval from Selectmen and Planning Board. In addition, that discussion would address visual improvements (i.e., trees and benches).

Second downtown planning session

Discussion ensued on goals for the session including uses allowed in the business district and a few that HDC would like to add based on feedback from the public and Corporation including mixed uses, and to establish zones for height as well as parking, and preview design guidelines. Also mentioned was finalizing wording for Annual Town Meeting warrant for mixed use, residential commercial in the business district by-law as well as two, three and four family housing.

Bill Gisness led the discussion on existing zoning by-laws for allowable uses such as single family residential, retail stores, service establishments, business and professional office, bank, restaurant, municipal and state buildings, non-profit, civic and fraternal building, public utility, parking area or garage for employees, customers or visitors, signs, accessory buildings, gasoline/service station, bus/rail terminal, funeral home, manufacturing, repair shop, automobile sales rooms, scientific research/development, wind energy, adult entertainment (state mandated).

Discussion was on plumbing contractor who had rented space in HDC's Willow Street commercial building for his office and other potential tenants that were interested including neighborhood market, sign painter, furniture showroom, artist studio/gallery, fitness training, bakery, hair salon, day spa.

The HDC wants to accomplish adding uses to by-law including two, three, four multi-family housing, mixed use residential/commercial, village area wastewater treatment, public parking lot. Gisness outlined Hamilton's business district, and the Willow Street overlay district that allows mixed use residential/commercial on properties in this area, and the Wenham business district. The HDC's purview and allowed focus is the business district by statute. Mixed use with commercial below and residential above is not allowed in the business district except for Willow Street overlay area.

The HDC would like to put two, three, four multi-family into the zoning by-laws for Hamilton to address the cycle of housing that makes a fiscally healthy Town. This consists of apartments and condominiums for single people 18 to 25 years old with no children so they can live in Hamilton. They would not use the school system but could participate in the community through volunteering (i.e., coaching). Former Selectman and FinCom member Jeff Stinson who falls into this demographic wanted to stay in Town but found housing in Beverly. Also, the importance of mixed use with businesses on the first floor of a building and apartment above to generate income for property owners to assist with mortgage or property taxes.

Discussion ensued about four unit building on Pleasant Street and apartment above the Community Package Store. Mike's Auto had been a grandfathered use. The HDC is interested in leaving the multi-family use open to be market driven relative to number of units and site size, septic, parking and set back requirements. The site plan approval/Special Permit process would be controlled by abutters, HDC and design guidelines. Also addressed was a developer's right to get a multi-family unit on their lot while meeting all requirements (i.e., septic system).

Discussion was on suggestion that this type of housing could be developed in other parts of Town and that the HDC's legal purview by statute is the downtown so this the starting point area for multi-family. Some downtown residents expressed concern that these types of uses would not be done in any other part of Town and they do not want increased density in the downtown. Also, that Hamilton is wide open for Chapter 40B development because the Town does meet the state mandated number of 10% of housing has to be affordable.

Discussion addressed Planning Board review of proposals for 24 units of senior housing at Canterbrook property and 12 units of market rate senior housing at the Patton property and special interest groups that do not want development anywhere in Town. Rick Mitchell who is also a Planning Board member described how effort is underway to carefully control growth to have a vibrant Town with young and senior residents.

Abutters spoke to change and importance of scale of growth in the downtown neighborhood, history of Hamilton's open space with zoning districts in downtown and east Hamilton (this is no longer active), as a place to raise children with downtown being pedestrian friendly and suggested multi-family housing would ruin the downtown and that the young demographic could find housing in Beverly, also suggested was that the former McRae property could be used to expand downtown parking. Discussion was about 2 out of 20 business owners who had spoken to HDC about how mixed used could make their properties more viable financially. Also, that results of the Cecil Group charrette and MAPC study had said to make the Town fiscally responsible and better mixed use and housing in the downtown area should be considered for younger people and seniors.

Reference was made to Firehouse Place with its four units and how it has not impacted the character of the downtown. Also addressed was what percentage of young people would find Hamilton an interesting enough place to live, and the limited rental units available with some outside of downtown renting quickly. Also expressed was sentiment that answers on septic and parking issues are needed before new development is added downtown.

Discussion was on zoning currently allowing 35' height on buildings (this could be three 9' to 10' floors) and that there could be a preference for this height along Bay Road and not necessarily next to single family homes. Gisness presented photographs of buildings in Town (i.e., the Community Package Store at 26' high). He noted that there is an unfinished apartment in this building since two apartments in one building cannot be used due to zoning. The Talbot's building is 25' high. Explanation was given on difference between gabled and flat roof relative to 35' height requirement. The Willowdale commercial building has three floors at 25' high. The condominiums at the corner of Willow and Asbury Streets are 22' high. The Timeless Interiors hip roof building is 25' high. The dentist building on Railroad Avenue is 26' high. The typical height of buildings is 25' to 28' high in Hamilton.

Discussion addressed if height limit was dropped from 35' to 28' this would reduce the value of buildings taking away rental income. Also, whether or not a design guideline should be incorporated into the zoning by-law rather than be a recommendation to limit height to below 35' for village scale architecture with 2.5 stories. Some attendees expressed opposition to 35', three-story buildings stating these were not village scale. The example of incoming Cumberland Farms building and lack of restrictions on what could be created under zoning by-law was discussed. Many downtown residents reiterated that they are not in favor of more density that would result from a third story

building that has an apartment with dormers. Gisness reiterated 27' and 28' as the preferred height for downtown business district as heard from attendees.

Discussion ensued about parking options in the downtown with zoning by-law specifying one parking space per residential unit, 1 space per 300 feet for business/retail, and many businesses downtown do not have any place to park and rent space to meet requirement. The Willow Street overlay district provides an option for shared spaces (residential uses space at night and business during day).

Current parking problems include commuter rail users parking on streets in business district. There is minimal or nonexistent employee parking on site for many uses (i.e., Winfrey's). Businesses are renting spaces from other lots to meet zoning requirements (i.e., Mobil station and Black Cow). The Post Office does not share spaces. The Hamilton police are going to do a study to understand how to control and stop commuters from parking in business district. There is currently a 2.5 hour parking limit on Railroad Avenue but it is not enforced. Current public parking spaces exist behind the former Mike's Auto and corner of Railroad Avenue and Willow Street, MBTA parking lot, and behind the HW Community House. The HDC plans to get involved with the police study and provide options for sharing of parking lots during off hours at the Post Office, Verizon building, Turfscapes, Family Medicine and public safety building. Also suggested was facilitating parking better (there are yearly rentals for some spaces) possibly with use of walkways behind Family Medicine, Post Office and Verizon buildings.

Discussion ensued about possibility of creating a parking lot behind McRae's property with consideration of abutters relative to setbacks and lighting. The HDC will consider this use on the 1-acre property along with other uses and the parking would be concealed. Also addressed was approaching the MBTA about a structured level of parking, if off hour parking could be used when businesses are not open (i.e., bank), reconfiguring parking on Railroad Avenue using angled parking to allow for more cars, research if site plan review specifies no parking next to bank on Railroad Avenue, if a pedestrian walkway should be developed behind Timeless Interiors building to parking lot behind Black Cow, formalize parking at Patton Park for employees, lower level in Mr. Lappin's parking lot that could be shared with Railroad Avenue business owners. Gisness will discuss these ideas with police and business owners. Discussion was on solving downtown business parking needs, septic for businesses to allow mixed uses, that multi-family housing could bring many cars to the area, and that setbacks are needed for neighborhood especially for snow storage.

Discussion ensued on design guidelines for the business district that embellish guidelines from MAPC study along with what is being used in other communities. Many Town boards will review these guidelines that will specify what Hamilton wants to see with new structures built in Town. Cumberland Farms had used information from the Town's visioning studies (Cecil Group and MAPC) when proposing its development. The purpose of the guidelines is to preserve and enhance the New England character of the Hamilton centers and thoroughfare, promote attractive development of the commercial areas, streamline the approval process for commercial development, link commercial property visually and physically to the surrounding land uses, facilitate a more walkable and healthier suburban atmosphere integrating needs of pedestrians with those of drivers, and protect property values by enhancing Town's appearance.

Elements of pedestrian friendly buildings in the village area include modest scale (i.e., height), orientation toward the street with maximum frontage on the street, close proximity to the street, parking behind buildings, pedestrian amenities (i.e., plazas and benches), big windows on ground floor with no blank walls, broken up roofscape (i.e., use of dormers), use of natural materials such as wood, brick or stone, camouflage large parking areas, storage spots and mechanical equipment.

Gisness outlined details for design guideline discussion that will occur at the HDC's next visioning meeting on January 10 as design massing scale (i.e., setbacks), height and proportions, store front vocabulary, roof types, windows, architectural style and details, entrances, materials and color, use of awnings, use of trees, planting, landscaping and signage. Also to be addressed at the January 10 meeting will be parking, sidewalks, crosswalks, pedestrian improvements. Next steps after this meeting will be HDC's every other Wednesday morning meetings at 7:30 a.m. Discussion addressed how HWCAM is unavailable to videotape the meetings.

Discussion explained that the Urban Land Institute (ULI) is a group associated with construction, engineering, design, planning, real estate, banking. Gisness is a member of this national group. ULI looks at town centers and does studies to recommend what a community should do for development (i.e., height of buildings). The HDC will be looking to ULI for information on market study and financial benefit where ULI talks to commercial brokers for a cost of \$6,000 and holds a 6-hour presentation. ULI could provide information on how many residential units Hamilton would like to see downtown. In addition, ULI has knowledge about funding sources that could be used for a downtown septic system.

Some attendees from outside of the business district expressed favorable interest in seeing mixed use and multi-family housing in the downtown. Discussion was on how Selectmen and Planning Board would be presented with idea of mixed use and multi-family units in the business district for discussion. Also addressed was how a site such as the former Hansbury property would be ideal for mixed use of retail and residential. In addition, that the HDC purchased the former McRae property to use design guidelines to develop the property in a way that the Town would like to see.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Jane Dooley, Minutes Secretary

ATTEST: _____
Brian Stein, President