

Meeting Minutes

Joint Committee Meeting with VHB

April 27, 2020 – 6PM via Webex

Attendees: Councilor Tracey Honan, Councilor Peter Christopher, Councilor Stephen Ruggiero, Councilor Barbara Flockhart, Councilor Rob DeMarco, Councilor Jim Letterie, Councilor Richard Ferrino, Geoffrey Morrison-Logan (Managing Director, Planning and Landscape Architecture, VHB)

This was a preliminary meeting of the Joint Committee (Economic Development Committee and Rules and Ordinances Committee) to facilitate introductions and discuss the purpose of utilizing VHB, a civil engineering company in Boston, Massachusetts, and to discuss the public process for zoning the middle school.

VHB will be utilized by the Town of Winthrop to facilitate the process of the development of the old Middle School site. It is the intent of the facilitation to ensure adequate and effective community outreach in regard to the development, to provide help with project visioning, to determine and remediate any roadblocks to development, and to aid the Town in the drafting of an appropriate zoning ordinance to apply to the development which can ultimately be submitted to the Planning Board for consideration. Geoffrey Morrison-Logan, the Managing Director, Planning and Landscape Architecture of VHB, has advanced training in community facilitation, and he enjoys working with the public.

After introductions, all participating Councilors engaged in a productive conversation regarding the above noted intent, in order to familiarize VHB with the Middle School site. The discussion included topics such as the history of the site, the question of its boundaries, perceived roadblocks to development, the 2017 Master Plan, and the steps which should be taken (per VHB) in order to navigate the development of the site successfully.

Richard Ferrino (RF) expressed concerns regarding the deed for Ingleside park, Article 97, and the access road constructed/paved approx. 6-7 years ago. He stated that there have been a lot of negative vibes throughout the community regarding development in the community and the feeling that the meetings were not as public as they could have been, and that decisions had been made at the Managers level. Stated the need to communicate adequately to the community – this should be a priority. New ideas should be considered along with old ideas. He reiterated that the issue of Article 97 needs to be resolved and made unambiguous. Stated that the Town has always wanted a Recreation Center, a place for Parks and Rec. to operate out of; stated that the Town even pursued the YMCA at one time. Winthrop does not have a lot of ‘usable’ land. The whole Master Plan was begun because we knew the parcel was becoming available. We thought it would be incorporated into the CBD but that fell through in the Fall. Would it be possible to gain some open space from development of the site?

Barbara Flockhart (BF) stated that the park must remain a park. The rink is very important to the Town, and it is imperative that we have a rink, but not necessarily where it is now. Might there be a benefit in including a new rink as part of the new development? We would like to move quickly on this development. Stated that there were already 4 plans defined in the 2017 Master Plan with graphical

portrayals. The Council goal in development of the site is tax revenue. She stated that while the Town does need a new Safety Building, this site should not be used for that. The town needs a Community Center. One or more of the Master Plan ideas contained a look-through to Ingleside from the CBD, but it unfortunately aligns with the CVS parking lot...Is the land under the site capable of having parking?

Jim Letterie (JL) stated that the initial plan, presented ~3-5 years ago, was to demolish the old middle school site first, develop a new rink there, then demolish the old rink, so that there was no time that the Town was without a rink. He stated the Town would love a new rink but questioned whether it was economically feasible. (rinks are expensive: >12-14 million). Privatizing the rink raises concerns of access. The recent state grant for improvements to the rink (1.2 million) was only a band aid and more upgrades are needed. He does not think that the access road behind the rink is an actual road ('legal'). The Town is looking for economic stimulus as a result of the development of this site. It should not be the new public safety building. He stated that it would be good to know/understand what we *can* and *cannot* do (i.e. what's possible) at the site. Would it be possible to have a visual created for developer's w/o the buildings there, for them to better visualize the site? Stated that parking underneath the property is possible, but only a matter of \$. Regarding insurance at the site: we do still use the gym.

Tracey Honan (TH) stated that there is an existing footprint, and that the new development should not go outside of that footprint and infringe upon existing park/green space. She agreed that the point of the development would be the much-needed economic stimulus for the Town. She insisted that the questions surrounding the deed, and the Article 97 issue must be resolved once and for all. Development which would not increase traffic, the need for parking, or greater strain on our resources (i.e. schools) should be considered a priority. Abutting neighbors must be considered in any new zoning. Zoning to allow a multi-use development which could serve Winthrop as well as any new residents should be considered. Options such as micro-units are an idea which could address the traffic, parking, and resource issues.

Stephen Ruggiero (SR) stated that the Town needs to consider what is realistic in the space. All problems cannot be solved with this one development. Realistic goals must be set and there needs to be an adequate communication strategy to ensure the public is kept informed. There should be as many opportunities for community input as possible. The Community has wants regarding the site, but the Town can't finance it on its own. If we want an amenity, what would the developer want in return? Stated that there was a lot of time/money/effort that went into the Master Plan, and that we should reinitiate that community conversation. We also need to loop in the Planning Board, so they are informed, and we don't waste time.

Geoffrey Morrison-Logan (GML) stated that the council and community need to establish a baseline together. We must step back and define 'what is zoning' and what it is not; why zoning is a tool. Developers want defined zoning. It's important to agree on principles, independent of use and scale (i.e. what does Winthrop want?) What was the response to the last RFI? He suggested defining dimensional requirements, create the bones of a development proposal, then start on a zoning proposal from there. Visioning is needed, possibly 3-4 different illustrations. His company worked on the Arsenal project in Watertown and he could share graphics from that project. He would like to know what the property is appraised for. There are a lot of answers in the Master Plan, and zoning can be drafted based on that. He stated that we could use that plan; re-package it. We need to determine where the consensus is

within the Master Plan. What do we want out of the development? Offsets? Amenities? This needs consensus as well.

Peter Christopher (PC) stated that one problem is that we never had an exactly defined area for the property (boundaries and property lines, developable area), and it was not part of the last RFI. We don't necessarily want spot zoning here. Visioning and Zoning are important. We need something in place that can guide developers. Possibly a CBD overlay? The attempt to include the property into the CBD zoning failed last Fall. The buildings, as they are, are not salvageable. However, should we still insure the buildings for liability purposes and hazard insurance?

GML: Recap – what are the next steps? We should meet another time to discuss goals, objectives, agendas for community meetings, etc. GML will draft a 'get-ready' plan. He understands he needs to set up conversations to determine the following:

- the property boundaries
- ownership of the park
- the roadway
- the issue of the Safety building site
- recreation center
- new rink feasibility
- Master Plan reconfirmation
- Zoning 101 (what it is, how its used, flexibility, working with developers)
- Public meetings and community outreach
- 2-3 month timeline foreseen