

Planning Board Forum on Land Use Planning

Town House, Tamworth, NH

August 17, 2009

7:00 - 9:00 p.m.

Present: Dom Bergen, PB Chairman, Tom Cleveland, Willie Farnum, Selectperson Representative, David Little, Tom Peters, Alternate, Nicole Maher Whiteside.

A total of 42 people were present on a hot (and increasingly buggy) evening.

Dom Bergen welcomed people, introduced idea behind forum: of surveys made available to 1250 registered voters (sic: residents and property owners) by the Master Plan committee, 500 were filled out and returned; of those 500, a majority wanted to plan for land use, though some respondents did not want to be told what to do at all. The Planning Board is holding three forums, of which this is the second, to see what the people mean when they say they want land use planning.

Nicole Maher-Whiteside moderated. She asked what people love about Tamworth, what they want to keep or change, what kind of planning they do or do not want, and frequently reminded the people that the Planning Board is asking for and listening to what the people say about the town and any potential land use regulations/planning/zoning.

At the end, those present were reminded that there are handouts from the Master Plan committee about various land use models (library, town offices, Other Store), that there are copies of the Master Plan report present at the meeting and always at the library, and that it can be viewed from a CD (also available at the library) and on the town website, and they were asked to talk about what they learned or thought tonight or learn from reading the handouts, and encourage more people to come to the next meeting, Saturday, August 29, 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon at the Town House.

DETAILS OF THE DISCUSSION:

- suggests a new questionnaire, thought the old one was a surprise, thinks 500 responses not representative of the whole community. He came to Tamworth because of no rules, accepts regulation of junk yards and gravel pits, but says zoning will cost the town to regulate.
- What has kept her here is the community feel. She cites the many non-profits helping each other. The taxes are SO high. She fears big business (a possible income stream for us) is threatened by no regulations. She suggests BROAD categories and a broader tax base. The town does not have to change because of zoning, but it could become more stable. We could protect ourselves by encouraging a certain kind of business (growth).
- 1. land use regulations lead to greater stability, and we should/could encourage economic development in keeping with the town, the Master Plan, and the environment. 2. In time, pressures will change; we need to look 20 years ahead and not play catch-up. We should anticipate these pressures and the problems arising from them.
- zoning seems to always escalate from reasonable to unreasonable restrictions (every tree, every house color) and that before long, zoning could make this beautiful little town become a big city.

(discussion, curtailed by Moderator)

- lived under zoning for years in Connecticut and it never restricted house color, etc. Zoning is a living, constantly changing set of rules. We NEED land use management.
- applauds the Planning Board for making these forums available at differing times and places so many different people can be present. She did not find the Master Plan process a surprise, there had been so much PR. She lived in a town with zoning, for 29 years, and found no restrictions, had a positive experience, suggests we be very thoughtful in our approach, and it will work.
- asks what are we trying to solve?

Nicole Maher-Whiteside: Master Plan respondents wanted some kind of land use regulation. This is a conversation; we need to know what the people think and want.

- Is this the Wild West? Are there really NO restrictions?

(short discussion)

- thought the people voted down zoning several times, and is adamantly opposed to it.
- retired because of too many regulations; the paperwork becomes as expensive as the rest of starting up a business.
- 80% of our land is in Current Use, and the town already has to abide by state rules, and the state is run by our representatives. There is plenty of regulation - though there could be improvements. Development AND preservation both need to be accommodated.

- grew up in rural south, architect father an early proponent of zoning, which the area began to believe in 20 years later - after huge uncontrolled growth (300% and ugly sprawl). She says the discussion tonight makes her think of the rules of the road: that we all drive different cars in different ways, use different kinds of gas and sport different bumper stickers, but we all agree on some rules for our mutual benefit and safety.

NICOLE MAHER-WHITESIDE: So you're saying there are and ought to be rules?

- Yes, I am.
- Tom Peters: Master Plan respondents overwhelmingly wanted the town to stay the way it is. How do we do that? How do we go about growing and staying the same?
- own a small "hobby" farm, came here from a New York state farm area which had zoning which was confining and restrictive. She has the sense zoning is inevitable here, but does not want THAT kind of zoning. Her points: 1. Preserve agriculture 2. This could be a slippery slope (towards THAT kind of zoning) 3. Suggests we don't have to do it all at once, but carefully, bit by bit.
- landscapes respond, they develop and are molded by the local economy. Our landscape developed from a culture of agriculture and logging. What is a genuine economy? He has a dream of ours redeveloping: agriculture and logging, with all the attending and support industries. 1. To generate jobs 2. To continue to strengthen the landscape we love. The conversation and decisions we need to have are about what kind of economy we will have. He hopes for a land-based economy - not land preservation.
- quotes Robert Frost: The land belonged to us
before we belonged to the land.

The land shapes us. He wants to hear the anti-zoning peoples' philosophies, and what they want for their children and their grandchildren.

NICOLE MAHER-WHITESIDE: You answer that first.

- foremost we need balance. For example, wildlife needs thoroughfares. He does NOT value zoning that impinges on personal liberties - like the model of five-acre lots, which fragment wildlife habitat. He reminds us that we - people, animals, and environment - are all one.
- grew up on Cape Cod, which, while unprotected, she saw ruined. She doesn't want that, and she also doesn't want to be over zoned. We need to attract young people - and we need to encourage technology.
- lives here for the mix of forest, farm, village, mountains, and rivers. It is unique. But be careful not to think of this as a museum: we need to work, to farm, to log. We need to: protect

identified habitats, protect contiguous forest (for wildlife, snowmobiles, and horses - alternatives to driving) plan for future development and recognize clusters/villages - so as to maintain wild areas

- Tamworth is not an island. We are affected by what happens everywhere. Energy costs will skyrocket, and suburbs will die because moving so far and often to get essentials will be prohibitive. He thinks communities will inevitably be clustering in villages, like our village (unless everybody leaves entirely!).

NICOLE MAHER-WHITESIDE so, conserving, preserving large tracts. One of the attendees said, 2 weeks ago, that the model for zoning, 15 years ago, was 5 acres for one house. This is no longer seen as optimal or right. We don't know what will happen in another 15 years. So we have to think harder, and we have to listen to each other. We value our autonomy, and we value the beauty of our community.

- has been for it (regulation) and he has been against it. Right now he is undecided. Says the bad economy is a real problem. If we lose our ability to adapt quickly, it could be troubling, and hurt people. He hates rules - the state and Federal government have enough - and likes good neighbors. Mostly, he says, forgetting that we are a community and taking sides is wrong.
- has never lived under zoning. He is under the impression that it can be changed. Can it?

NICOLE MAHER-WHITESIDE reminds people to say what they particularly want, as well as what they fear.

- particularly values the place in our community of cottage industries, and wants to protect the ability of every individual in Tamworth to do what they want.
- loves the views of unmolested mountains, cites and bemoans the Jackson mountainsides covered with large, reflective houses; says she loves to go up Great Hill Tower, out of her usual route seeing Tamworth by car from roads, and see that we live in a vast expanse of mostly trees.
- values the people and their many skill sets, is so glad she can appeal to them (via TamworthExchange, for example) and wants this diversity to be preserved.
- served many years on the planning board in Tuftonboro, has experience with zoning, agrees zoning can be too specific and detail oriented, and asks if we can go into it with the intention to not let the details take away from the freedoms.

NICOLE MAHER-WHITESIDE again recognizes the presence and validity of fear of the slippery slope of restrictive zoning, reminds us of the concept of Reasonable, says things are changing faster, not slower, reaffirms that the group wants to preserve flexibility, reminds people to think hard and stay with the big picture.

- grew up in a town of fewer than 100 people, says we need to support local business, and is sad to see the store closed, it is smart and self serving to pay a little more at a store 100' away than to drive (20-80 miles each way is the norm, editor's note) to save a few cents on items.

(general lament and agreement)

- it sounds like everybody loves things the way they are, and some are afraid of what will happen if we do have rules, while others are afraid of what will happen if we don't. But that we all have similar cares.
- if you have zoning, you are by definition changing things, because having no zoning (Are we one of three towns in the whole state left with no zoning? he asks. Six, Steve Gray replied.) is one of the things that makes Tamworth what it is.
- has a strong vision of local economy.
- while we allow noisy motorcycles on the road and in the village, we have decided to not allow a racetrack (which he thinks would be a source of income to the town), partly from a fear of the noise.

NICOLE MAHER-WHITESIDE - there is one more forum planned. Should there be more? An attendee had suggested another questionnaire. The Planning Board needs to hear what people want.

David Little is to direct the rest of the meeting.

David Little there are several sorts of land use planning models for us to think about, but there is not enough time left tonight to make that presentation.

NICOLE MAHER-WHITESIDE: We are looking for input. We, the Planning Board, are not going to make up and write these rules. The people need to do it, and they have to be broad. We all want and need to avoid the slippery slope of trying to control minutiae like laundry and house color. Please talk to everybody you know. There are more people here than last time; we hope there will be more next time. Maybe we need three more? This is not a Planning Board to the People process; it is a People to the Planning Board process. If it is done well, then no one will be happy, but everyone will have a little bit of what they want.

- There must be a hundred successful townships from here to California. Can we look at these models (of zoning) that preserve what we value? Just get in a plane and head out to see that we are unique!

Dom Bergen: There are more reports of the Master Plan committee here to peruse, and some at the library. We can continue the conversation on the TamworthExchange.

NICOLE MAHER-WHITESIDE: How can we get more people involved?

- Food!

(general agreement, light discussion)

- if you are not on the internet and the Exchange, there is no good way to be part of the conversation, or informed. We need a way to communicate.
- points to the importance of how you frame the conversation. He thinks it is about the economy and jobs, and if you say so, it will attract more people.
- lives in a rural area, where he can see ten houses (at a stretch), in seven of which are businesses.
- suggests Local Business Breakfasts to discuss, and listen to discussions of, what regulations would be good for local businesses.
- wonders how no zoning is off-putting to businesses coming in?
- a small business like hers (child care-early education) is not so worried, but a bigger business, with substantial startup costs, payroll, land, buildings, etc., cannot trust what might happen to their investment if there are not assurances what could happen in their vicinity.
- regulations help IF they preserve what makes us valuable. He says what we have (are pondering) is a blank slate; it is hard to get our bearings. We maybe should look for a similar town. Maybe if we saw an example, we can see what we like, what we don't like (about their zoning).

NICOLE MAHER-WHITESIDE: We have wanted to discover and write our own (rules). We want, we need to avoid the danger of starting any conversation based on the rules of others, rather than designing something unique to Tamworth. We hope to design something based on what we want, not on what we don't want.

- tells story of people wanting to live in the country, moving close to a farm, soon the farm is surrounded by people, who start to mind the smells, the sprays. Soon they complain, and the farm - what attracted them to the place - is closed.
- the small flyer helped her learn a lot about land use, and recommends it.
- would like to know that farmers and cottage industry types are deeply involved in committee work, and that the results meet in the middle.
- How do we attract specific businesses to specific areas?

NICOLE MAHER-WHITESIDE thanked everyone for presence, thoughts, urges conversations with friends and coming to NEXT FORUM: Saturday, Aug. 29, 10:00-12:00 at the Town House.