

## **Town of Leicester Planning Board**

### **Meeting Minutes**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Jason Grimshaw, Chair; Debra Friedman, Sharon Nist; Alaa AbuSalah, Andrew Kularski

ASSOCIATE MEMBER: Robyn Zwicker

MEMBERS ABSENT:

IN ATTENDANCE: Michelle Buck, Town Planner; Barbara Knox, Board Secretary; Harry Brooks, Board of Selectmen

MEETING DATE: **December 5, 2017**

MEETING TIME: 7:00PM

AGENDA:

- 7:00PM      General Discussion:  
                 Leicester Housing Study Presentation (Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission)
- 7:20PM      Approval of Minutes  
                 ❖ 11/7/2017
- 7:30PM      Town Planner Report/General Discussion:  
                 A. KM Kelly, Inc. (93 Huntoon Memorial), Landscaping Bond  
                 B. 408 Stafford Street (SP2017-03), Driveway Changes  
                 C. Miscellaneous Project Updates  
                 D. Future Zoning Amendments

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Mr. Grimshaw called the meeting to order at 7:00PM

#### **General Discussion:**

##### Leicester Housing Study Presentation (Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission)

Ms. Buck gave a brief overview on the Town receiving a District Local Technical Assistant Grant last spring to have CMRPC work on a Housing Study for the Town. Mr. Ron Barron from CMRPC made the PowerPoint presentation.

##### *The Purpose and Background*

The Project was brought to CMRPC in early 2017 to examine what might be holding back development in Town. Conversations with the Town Planner and Town Assessor showed no new requests for subdivisions and the only housing approved had been done through ANRs.

##### *The Approach*

They looked at a cluster of Towns around Worcester and oriented more toward Worcester than Boston, to examine the demographic and housing market data to see if there was a demand that Leicester wasn't capturing. The area Towns were Auburn, Charlton, East Brookfield, Holden, Millbury, Oxford, Rutland and Spencer. The reason choosing those communities were the proximity to Worcester, assuming the Towns were bedroom communities of Worcester and Towns on the western side of Worcester are more likely to be oriented toward Worcester than Boston. These Towns have similar rural-residential character as Leicester and had accessibility to State Highway corridors. They examined the demographic and housing data for Leicester and surrounding communities. They compared the zoning, infrastructure and similar characteristics, such as population growth, house sales volume and comparable home prices.

### *Population Growth (1940-2030)*

Leicester saw a rapid population growth between 1940 and 1970 and growth slowed dramatically since 1980. That trend was projected to continue to slow through the next two decades, culminating in population loss by 2030.

### *Rate of Growth – Historic*

Chart reviewed showing Leicester having a 3% decrease in growth by 2030.

### *Regional Growth Rate (1990-2010)*

Compared to the region, Leicester was projected to grow slower. The Town has only grown just 8% since 1990, compared to an average of 15% for the region. Mr. Barron explained Rutland's extreme rate of growth in that period had skewed the data somewhat. However, the data was still included, because it was indicative to the kind of regional demand he was seeking to analyze.

### *Regional Projected Growth Rate (2010-2030)*

Chart reviewed showing the projected growth for Leicester compared to surrounding Towns.

### *Population Change in Leicester (2000-2010, by age cohort)*

The Town has seen a severe drop in young professional population, with steep rises in middle-aged workers and retirement age residents. Projections expect this pattern to shift, leaving retirement-age residents the dominant cohort by 2030.

### *Population Cohorts as Percent of Total Population (2010)*

Prime working age population in Leicester still represents a majority of share of the overall population in town. However, that share is shrinking and this was the pattern reflected throughout the market area.

### *FINDINGS (population growth)*

People are moving to the Worcester periphery and the other Towns in the study area had attracted huge amount of growth. Much of that growth was concentrated in single-family housing and rentals made up a smaller proportion of the overall market.

Leicester was under-performing in capturing this migration.

### *Market Trends*

Comparisons were made on, how population growth fared compared to the region; how sales volume fared; home sale prices and how the unit volume has produced.

### *Median Sales Price compared to Regional Average*

Prices for single-family homes suffered a great deal from the recession. Median price for single-family homes dropped 32% from 2006-2009 by the end of the recession. Prices have not significantly recovered since then, with prices still barely around 40% of the 2006 high.

### *Average number of homes sold by year*

Chart compared number of houses sold, by year, (2006-2016).

### *Single-family building permits in Leicester (2000-2012)*

New housing slowed significantly since 2000 and dropped 30% by 2012. Despite evidence of the sales market recovering, this drop was the result of a glut of units on the market at that time.

### *Total housing permits issued by year (2000-2012)*

Despite the slow response to market demand, Leicester still consistently been at or above

regional average in single-family housing and only in, 2000, 2007-2008, was production at or below average.

#### *FINDINGS (Market Trends)*

Leicester has been unable to attract development suitable to facilitate growth compared to the region. While the region, as a whole, experienced solid population growth, even with lingering effects of the rescission. The question remains, what is getting in the way of Leicester's growth?

#### *Constraints Analysis*

Comparisons were made on, how population growth fared compared to the region; how sales volumes fared; how home prices compared and how unit volume production compared to the region.

#### *Major Constraints*

Multiple water/sewer districts cause confusion and uncertainty on availability. There is limited capacity of water and sewer to much of the Town. Although the capacity in Cherry Valley was good, new construction could strain the system. Upon conversations with 2 of the 4 districts in Town noted having capacity for development, but the biggest concern was the confusion on having multiple districts in Town.

Leicester has limited major highway access. The corridor runs along state highways, through other Towns and Worcester being somewhat of a barrier.

The Town's minimum lot size requirements are far larger than most other communities, maximum lot coverage are much smaller, and multi-family housing was not allowed by right in any district zone.

#### *Highway Access*

Leicester is separated from Major Highways, having only Route 9 and Route 56 as their principal corridors. That potentially could be what put constraints on development in Town.

Ms. Friedman asked how this compared to all the other Towns, like Rutland and the Towns that were seen to have high growth. Mr. Barron said Rutland was an anomaly because it is pretty far from a major highway. Paxton and Holden were a bit closer to 190 and Charlton was another hydro town being close to a highway. Ms. Friedman noted Charlton being further then Leicester. Mr. Barron said a lot of the perception on constraint was subjective.

Ms. Friedman asked who he spoke with when he got this consensus. Mr. Barron said it was with real estate agents and people who live in Town. He wanted to get from the different real estate agents, their thoughts on what was preventing people from wanting to move to Leicester.

Ms. Friedman asked if they were realtors who specialized in this area or realtors from Worcester.

Mr. Barron said there were not a lot of realtors who specialized in this area and the ones who did were the ones he spoke with.

#### *Existing Multi-family Districts*

The only areas allowing multi-family housing in Leicester were shown along Route 9, Cherry Valley and Route 56 South, Rochdale.

#### *Route 9, Cherry Valley*

This chart showed the local zone (B & R2) allowing multi-family, marking out the WRTA Route. The areas not grayed out were the districts that allow multi-family, two-family, three-family or

up as a special permit use. The red line marks out the bus route, which makes that area a good candidate for additional housing. In addition, his discussions with the water/sewer district, there was a lot of sewer capacity in that area.

#### *Route 56, South (Rochdale)*

This chart showed 4 zones where multi-family was allowed and sewer capacity in the areas along Route 56 & Clark Street. On issue in this area was only 6% of parcels along Route 56 allowed multi-family housing and 50% require 50,000 square feet of minimum lot size.

#### *Zoning: Median minimum lot sizes*

This chart showed the median differences between the largest and smallest lot sizes in Leicester. It did not take into account the Overlay Districts, just the base zoning. There were huge differences between what Leicester allowed and what other Towns allowed. There were no communities having more than a maximum lot size of 80,000 and the closest Town was Rutland with 65,000.

#### *Available land, allowed uses*

This chart showed each zoning districts, by name; GIS acres, single-family housing, 2-family housing and multi-family housing. Leicester has two types of multi-family housing; 2-family housing allowed by Special permit, in Business, Central Business, Residential 2 and Residential Industrial Business. Multi-family housing allowed by Special Permit, in Business, Central Business and Residential Industrial Business. There were no districts allowing multi-family by-right.

#### *Mix of Housing Units*

This chart showed the number of Leicester's mixed housing units in comparison to surrounding Towns.

#### *Market Perception*

Some of the things that came out of discussion with realtors and residents were the current market wants larger homes on smaller lots and that was hard to find in Leicester. There were a lot of young families and a lot of older people, but not many in the middle. There were not enough of rentals for young professionals, young families or young people who want to start small.

The schools were perceived as under-performing and unsafe and bullying was mentioned as being an issue.

In addition, a few of the business people, residents and realtors mentioned working with the Town can be a challenge and makes developers not want to come to Leicester.

Leicester has too few businesses & amenities; there is a lack of restaurants & other businesses impediment to growth. The Town is isolated, has insufficient access to major highways, and only seen as a bedroom community for Worcester.

#### *Recommendations*

Comparisons were on how population growth fared compared to the region; the volume of housing; home prices and how the unit volume has produced.

#### *Zoning Reforms*

Leicester needs to consider allowing multi-family, by-right, in Business & Central Business Districts and especially in mixed-use developments.

In addition, the Town needs to consider reducing the minimum lot sizes in most of the residential districts and amend the Open Space By-law to allow smaller minimum lot sizes by-right.

There were no other communities showing 80,000 square foot lots and analysis showed less than 50% of the parcels in those zones were at or larger than 15,000 minimum lot size.

The Town should also consider amending the Open Space Bylaw allowing a smaller minimum lot size, as a starting point.

#### *Town Led Actions*

These are actions that can be pursued without having to go to Town Meeting. Leicester needs to consider forming a consortium between water and sewer districts, making it an integral part of the planning process. To have regular meeting to standardize processing, rates, and working towards consolidating the districts into one. In addition, facilitate communication with brokers and developers, such as a Brokers Breakfast meeting. Consider coordinating a plan with the school district and facilitating a housing production plan.

#### *Workforce Housing Special Tax Assessment plan*

This only applies to homes that are affordable to middle-income residents. It's a designated area of Town where developers can be offered a tax increment incentive to build affordable housing. For example; developers would be allowed a tax reduction for up to 5 years; 100% up to 2 years of constructions and can request an additional deduction for up to 3 years after construction, i.e., year 3 = up to 75%; year 4 = up to 50%; year 5 = up to 25%.

#### *Workforce Housing Special Tax Assessment (WH-STA) Area*

This process would require a zone be established in WH-STA plan and show where the housing was to be built, the minimum number of units that qualify and procedures for developers to apply. The Town, at a Town Meeting, must adopt this process; it expires after 3 years, but can be renewed by simple majority vote at any Town Meeting.

#### *Additional steps*

The Town should consider putting together a build-out analysis and looking at all available land and estimates. In addition, pursue WH-STA plan and reconsider adoption of Community Preservation Act. Adoption of the Community Preservation Act should be considered.

#### *Questions and Comments:*

Ms. Buck asked if any of the other communities in the study allowed of multi-family by-right. It was her understanding that some may allow 2-famil by-right, but did any of the suburban Towns allow multi-family by-right? Mr. Barron said no, not multi-family by-right. When saying multi-family, he was grouping that in with 3-family. Two-family are often allowed by right and three-family are often allowed by-right in specifically designated districts. He suggested researching which would work better for the Town, an Overlay District or a Bylaw Amendment and designate a specific corridor to allow by right.

Ms. Friedman said looking at lot sizes and the issues the Town has with water and sewer availability, when looking at a 20,000 square feet doesn't allow enough space for a septic and well, especially for a larger house. She asked what percentage of the Towns being compared, had Town water and Town sewer, versus septic and well. Mr. Barron said some have less sewer availability than Leicester, but Rutland is the exception to that because the developers have been putting in sewers for the Town. For most of the other rural communities, a little more than a 1-acre lot size was found to be more than sufficient to handle a well and septic. In some other

Towns, their Open Space Bylaw allowed for smaller lot sizes. They found a smaller lot can be oriented in such a way that the septic can be far enough away, provided that it was over near the open space area, where it wouldn't cause any problems when having a 20,000 square foot lot.

Ms. Friedman said highway access was mentioned during the presentation and Leicester being isolated. However, there are communities further out than Leicester with fewer amenities, such as, Spencer, East Brookfield, Paxton and Rutland. Leicester has better access to the Mass Pike and 290.

Mr. Zwicker agreed and said he lived in Worcester for a number of years and the only way he knew how to get into Leicester, was Route 9. Now that he lives in Leicester, he understood there were multiple ways to get into Town. He understood why people thought there was only one way to get into Town, and that could be because the Town was not marketing there were alternative routes available.

Mr. Barron said one of the things given overtime in this area is, people that don't live here and are trying to get to Leicester, only know one way, so how does the Town overcome that barrier?

He thought one of the solutions could be a Broker's Breakfast and having a conversation with the people who are selling the homes. Asking what the Town can do to improve Leicester's image.

Ms. Buck asked the timeframe for completing the study. Mr. Barron said the study needs to be completed before Christmas. He will submit his final draft to the Board, the week before, for additional review, to see if anything needed to be changed.

Mr. Brooks said information from a couple of the water/sewer districts and a couple of realtors may not have been a true account on everything. He asked if there was someone different these questions could be asked in order to get a more accurate account on everything. Mr. Barron said he's been trying to keep with the people who have roots in Town. One of the issues he ran into was there were not many who specialized in this area, so he had to improvise.

Ms. Buck asked if he had spoken with any developers who have developed in Town. Mr. Barron said that had been a challenge.

Ms. Friedman asked when saying building, does that refer to putting up new subdivisions or just existing lots on existing roads. In many neighborhoods, there are many new homes being built.

Ms. Buck said building permit reports have not been received since August, but previous reports show there's only been a handful. Mr. Kularski agreed seeing many new homes being built. Any existing building lot up for sale, are selling fast and homes are going up.

Ms. Friedman said there aren't a lot of homes for sale in Town and the ones interested in buying a home in Leicester, either find small homes on a small lot or a home that was way too expensive. Mr. Kularski agreed and said he had to build for that reason.

Ms. Friedman felt it would be interesting to get specifics from the realtors, as far as, how long a house is for sale and on the market in this Town, because it doesn't seem that it's for very long. She asked how many of the study Towns had done this same type of project. Mr. Barron said Rutland is working on a housing study but they are trying to slow development.

Ms. Friedman said part of the reason Leicester went to a 2 acre lot, was of having such strong development and the Town was nervous on how fast it was going. It always can be reversed but

the Town, at that time, needed to slow it down. At that point, when the lot sizes were increased, the Town didn't have the infrastructure that could supported the schools, fire and police.

### **Approval of Minutes**

11/7/2017

MOTION: Ms. Nist moved to approve the minutes of November 7, 2017, with minor corrections.

SECONDED: Ms. AbuSalah – Discussion: None – VOTE: All in Favor

### **Town Planner Report/General Discussion**

#### **A. KM Kelly, 93 Huntoon Highway (landscaping bond)**

This was a project approved last December and the building is now complete. The landscaping was not done in time due to the weather and it was just hydro-seeded yesterday.

Ms. Buck did a site inspection today and found everything else on site is good. The applicant did submit a \$10,000 landscaping bond in order to get their occupancy permit.

Hearing no further discussion, Mr. Grimshaw asked for a motion to accept the landscaping bond.

MOTION: Ms. Friedman moved to accept \$10,000 Surety for the landscaping at KM Kelly, Inc.

SECONDED: Ms. Nist – Discussion: None – VOTE: All in Favor

#### **B. 408 Stafford Street Solar (SP2017-03), Driveway Changes**

On the plan submitted, it was hard to tell what the changes were. It appeared the changes did not affect Planning Board's site plan review decision.

The Board wrote their decision so the developer could make this change, as long as Kevin Quinn signed off on it. Although, the plan was sent to the Fire Department for comment.

#### **C. Miscellaneous project update**

##### *Fire/EMS Building grand opening*

Notice was received today regarding an open house for the fire station, but the Planning Board hasn't signed off on the project yet. The Building Inspector is scheduled to do a final inspection on the building this Thursday. Kevin Quinn agreed to do an inspection either late tomorrow or early Thursday morning.

##### *Oakridge Estates*

Some of the residents of Oakridge Estates have concerns about grading work done in their backyards. There were a lot of extra large rocks during construction that were placed on the slopes for stabilization. The developer was not required to put in retention walls. Ms. Buck reviewed the plan and none of those rock piles were part of the Planning Board's jurisdiction. The rocks were not related to the road; it was just backyard grading issues and was a civil matter between the residents and developer.

#### **D. Future Zoning Amendments**

##### *Chicken Bylaw*

Ms. Buck said this will be resubmitted for approval at the spring Town Meeting. She suggested inviting the Agriculture Committee, as well as, the concerned residents, to the January 2, 2018

meeting, for a general discussion to find out exactly what they wanted. Ms. Friedman suggested asking them to come with a concept on what they were looking for, especially if they had researched what other Towns allowed. Ms. Buck said one thing they had to be careful with was that some Towns didn't limit the amount of chickens in their Zoning Bylaw, but did have strict Board of Health regulations. Ms. Friedman said that was the reason to invite them to the January meeting, because it seemed they didn't have a full understanding of regulations involved.

Mr. Books asked about inviting the Board of Health to the meeting. Ms. Buck agreed and will check into getting someone from the City of Worcester's Board of Health to extend a helping hand.

#### *Recreational Marijuana*

This will be resubmitted for approval at the spring Town Meeting.

#### *Housekeeping Amendments*

There are a backlog of housekeeping amendments (minor corrections and minor adjustments) to be worked on for future Town Meetings.

#### *Building Height on residential structures*

Ms. Buck asked whether the Board wanted to move forward working on this amendment or wait. She felt because the housing study didn't really offer much assistance on that topic, more discussion was needed. Ms. Friedman noted the Fire Chief saying he wasn't inclined to go that much higher, except on major roads. She said the issues on some of these undeveloped areas located on back roads are, the roads going into them have to be improved, because you can't put major developments going in where you have basically a cart path leading in. She felt that was not good practice for public safety. All Agreed.

#### *Lake Residential District*

Ms. Buck said the Zoning Board was again asking about lake residential districts and allowing smaller lot sizes around the lake. This was previously brought before the Planning Board and the Board members agreed that the Town shouldn't be making it easier to develop on small lots surrounding water bodies in areas without town sewer. She explained the ZBA was coming at this from the existing homeowners having to come before the Zoning Board to do anything on their properties. Ms. Friedman noted those property owners would have to go to the ZBA regardless because they were so many feet within the water.

Ms. Buck further explained the ZBA's concern was about the burden of the homeowners having to get a permit anytime they wanted to do anything on their lot. However, there is purpose for homeowners going to the ZBA. It protects the water body as well as protecting all the homeowners around that water body.

### **General Discussion**

Some discussion on marketing old mills for rehab into housing units for young professionals or empty nesters. Also better marketing resources the Town already had, because there was a lot in Town that just needed to be promoted the right way.

Mr. Brooks asked what the Planning Board's thoughts were on reducing lot sizes. Although he understood the concern about septic systems, was there a way of doing that where sewers were available? Ms. Friedman said where sewage was currently available; they already have smaller



lot sizes. She questioned when the Town had done the mapping on the build-out. Ms. Buck said approximately around 2003 when the Board increased the lot sizes.

Mr. Brooks felt it would be important for growth in the Town. He didn't see an issue with the schools because of the projections with a decline in enrollment.

Mr. Kularski said reducing frontage would probably be a better thought then reducing lot size. All that goes in the front was the driveway everything else goes in back. All of SA has septic systems and there needs to be enough room for two septic systems, because there has to be a reserve area in case one fails. If someone was building a 4-bedroom house, he or she would need 1,200 square feet for the septic systems.

Mr. Grimshaw said it seems that sewage was planned in areas that already existed with small lots, 40 years after the house was built. It wasn't feasible to build sewer in the Suburban Agriculture districts unless the developer knows that was worth his investment. He did like what was suggested earlier about Open Space and the area for septic.

Ms. Friedman said the Town's Open Space development hasn't been something developers have asked about. Ms. Buck noted the open space plan was adopted either right before or right after the housing market crash. She felt one thing that the Board could think about was expanding the R1 and R2 district boundaries.

Hearing no further comments or questions, Mr. Grimshaw asked for a motion to adjourn.

MOTION: Ms. Nist – moved to adjourn meeting

SECONDED: Mr. Kularski – Discussion: None – VOTE: All in Favor

Meeting adjourned at 9:15PM

Respectfully submitted:

*Barbara Knox*

Barbara Knox

**Documents included in mailing packet:**

- Agenda
- Planning Board Minutes 11/7/2017

**Documents submitted at meeting:**

- None