

ITEM 1 - ROLL CALL

Present: Christine Bennett – Chair, Carmela Braun – Vice Chair, Suzanne O'Connor – Secretary, Paul Shiner, Jim Latter, and Ben Pratt.

Also Present: Jeff Brubaker, Town Planner.

Absent: Jeff Leathe (excused).

Voting members: Christine Bennett, Carmela Braun, Suzanne O'Connor, Paul Shiner, and Jim Latter (appointed).

NOTE: Ms. Bennett introduced Ben Pratt, the newest member to join the Planning Board.

ITEM 2 – PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**ITEM 3 – MOMENT OF SILENCE****ITEM 4 – 10-MINUTE PUBLIC INPUT SESSION - None****ITEM 5 – PUBLIC HEARING - None**

A public hearing had been scheduled to be held tonight but the public notice failed to be printed in the legal notices. It will be re-scheduled to the next regularly scheduled meeting, with applicant concurrence.

ITEM 6 – NEW BUSINESS**A. Route 236 Zoning**

This is an administrative discussion about zoning along Route 236 to take a look at the uses, look and feel, and utility of this zone in conjunction with the improvements being made to the infrastructure related to water and sewer, and also with the current update to the Comprehensive Plan (Comp Plan). LeeJay Feldman is with us from Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission (SMPDC) to give an analysis of a Route 236 study that was conducted in 2020 and to advise the PB as to how they might approach looking at the zoning there.

Mr. Feldman introduced himself and said that he was asked under a previous Manager to look at the analysis on Route 236 for zoning purposes related to the TIF and a MDOT study to include improvements to the Route 236 corridor, including access management issues. While doing your Comp Plan and getting ready to undertake future land use analysis that the future land use piece of the plan could incorporate a fairly large portion of Route 236 to be considered a 'village zone'. You can start small. Even if the Comp Plan suggests a large area be considered for that doesn't mean undertaking re-zoning or creation of new performance standards for the entire area. In fact, it would be better to

start with a smaller node, or area, to see how it goes before expanding it to a much larger area for re-zoning. The Comp Plan is the precursor that really needs to be in place. If you try to do that now, and the Comp Plan didn't address it, then there could be questions and issues from folks that you won't have justification. Once the Comp Plan is adopted and recommends this, then you will be in good shape to move that type of re-zoning forward. I looked at not only the zone but what kind of standards you might want to put in place. I think you have a copy of "Town of Eliot: Where Tradition Meets Tomorrow Design Guidelines". I created that document for the Town as part of the study and is something that you can consider as you move forward. You can adopt a document like this to be standards for the Town or you could adopt it as a guideline, which would say to a developer 'this' is what we'd like you to do but we're not requiring it, where standards could be put in place to require a developer to do a certain look and feel in that segment of Town. One thing I want to mention is that I believe in baby steps. We can't just create something that is radically different from what we have but something that really starts to make a change. I think moving slowly over time can be proven what you're trying to accomplish. These guidelines are more about the design of buildings, parking, etc. It's not meant to be 'form-based' code but a hybrid form that is gradual. The other thing to think about is what we call a 'village zone', which are clusters of development. Tight, smaller lots, much closer together, which makes it a much more walkable community. Yes, this is Route 236 but, if you do it the right way, you can create nodes that are much more walkable where folks can park in one parking area and walk to another parking area. In doing that, especially with sewer coming into the area, don't be afraid to drop the lot sizes. With sewer, there's no reason to have 1-acre lot sizes; that you could consider going down to a 20,000-square-foot lot size and, if a developer needs more land in the area, they are going to assemble it somehow to make their project happen. You want to have small, clustered lots if you can. In doing that, you also want to have in-fill development. Where there's vacant lots in between two other developments, you want to encourage some sort of in-fill development to occur there to not have open land that creates a feel that there's a big, wide-open development; that you want to start making it feel smaller and closer and more tight-knit. In doing that, one thing I like to consider is not creating minimum setbacks. Instead, think about creating maximum setbacks so that the maximum setback might be 20 feet, 10 feet even in some cases. Because you usually have a property line, then you have a ROW, then you've got the road. What you want to try to do is narrow down that feel of that road. I did this a number of years ago with Route 4 where there are parts of it where buildings are very close together and that creates a kind of tunnel effect, which slows people down. Another thing to consider with this is parking standards. For years, we've lived with the need for a parking space for every three seats in a restaurant or one parking space for every 250 square feet of retail space and you know, by looking at that area, that half the year it's just pavement that sits there without the parking space being used and that creates stormwater problems, pollutants, etc. Say to the developers that you can't have 300 parking spaces, that we'll only allow 100 or 125 because, three quarters of the year, they won't be used. So, why do we want all that pavement, large stormwater ponds that have to be built to handle the runoff, etc. For now, I'll leave it there and be happy to answer questions. A lot of the design guidelines I'm suggesting in the book you have come from Kittery and the types of development there are being carried right through your Town, as an abutting town, so

there becomes this real common look and feel through the whole region as it builds out. I know this is just the very beginning, a precursor to what could be a long road ahead to be able to get some new standards in place. I'm here to help any way I can.

Mr. Latter said that I appreciate the maximum setback and the village feel. I just don't know where on Route 236 I can envision it. As it exists right now, it lends itself to a by-way. But I would say that this is awesome. Let's make 4 or 5 smaller districts and see if we can get some condensed development.

Mr. Feldman said that you can do that; that another part of considering this is creating a 'node'. Looking at land not just right on Route 236 but where are there large areas of land that may be available to create a 'node' so that you have a cluster of this type of development. It doesn't have to be, and you don't want just a straight shot right down Route 236 with this type of development. That's what you're trying to discourage, if you can. There are areas where you can create a 'node' rather than just a strip, the strip development that, hopefully, you are trying to eliminate over time.

Mr. Latter said that you are talking about grabbing a 200- or 300-acre parcel and creating a dense development within that parcel and calling it a 'node'. It's not dense onto Route 236 but it's part of that area and that's where you're talking about incentivizing that type of development.

Mr. Feldman said pretty much. I'm not going to put an acreage number on it. It's just looking at that land along the corridor and start literally putting circles around it and saying that 'this' area would be a great area for a 'node' or 'that' area would be great for a 'node'. And again, the zone doesn't have to be connected, as long as your Comp Plan suggests that that large area become a village-type district. It's not spot zoning. You can create a 'node' off 'here' as long as it's in the recommended area, or off 'here'. It doesn't have to be in any way connected to another village area as long as it's meeting the intent of your Comp Plan in the area that's it's calling out to be. Another aspect of this is don't shy away from it; that that might create spot zoning. If your Comp Plan calls it out, then it's not spot zoning.

Ms. Bennett said to just think about driving up just over the Kittery town line, just passing a storage space, and other businesses, along with residential uses along that southern end of Route 236. You get to the intersection with Bolt Hill, and there are some large parcels that are ripe for re-development that could create a new 'node' there at that intersection. By doing so, that would probably trigger a (traffic) light and Ms. Braun can probably talk at length about how dangerous that stretch of the road is; that tractor-trailers race between the light at Stevenson Road (Kittery) to get to the Beech Road intersection. Oftentimes, planners suggest creating a built environment where buildings are tighter and closer to the road and the human response to that is to slow down (traffic calming). At the Bolt Hill intersection, we have a rather large senior housing community and, then, at Beech Road, there is another residential complex. It feels like those might be two 'nodes' that we work with to try to create a 'village', some of this compact development. And also trying to encourage internal connections, thinking about how Eliot Commons is

built, which was done in the late 80's, and is probably coming up on a re-development. If you think about how that is being used today, a lot of people routinely travel behind that (main) structure to get to the Post Office. You already have Baran Place, Eliot Commons, etc. That's already, to some degree, it's organically becoming its own 'node'. But, if we think about how we want this to look and function, and what we want to see there, kind of flesh out a full-service 'village node', that, at least to my mind, is kind of the aspiration for this exercise. We've also talked about design standards because we're getting a lot of steel and sheet metal buildings along Route 236 that many of us in the community have not found aesthetically appealing or in congress with our New England built environment.

Mr. Feldman, taking that a little further, said that the connectivity doesn't have to be roadways but it's just encouraging access from parking lot to parking lot in some area where the flow can occur so that people aren't going back onto Route 236 and then, 500 feet down the road, having to get back off for another access. I think that's a lot of what Gorrill Palmer has looked at for the re-design of that area, as well. We talk about these types of development in that area, you haven't even started considering the types of uses you want there. I think you're going to want mixed use. Commercial developments on the first floor and apartment living spaces above. Whether it's here or anywhere, as you try to create more commercial space in these areas, the one thing that has to happen is that you need the people to be able to provide services for those people and the way to do it is to create mixed use development. He used ski areas as an example of mixed use.

Mr. Pratt said that what I got hung up on reading the documents is that we were talking about Beech Road, north, which is more of a corridor, a 'highway-esque' feel, and may have a lot to do with there not being many, or any, crossroads. Talking about Beech Road to Bolt Hill makes total sense to me. I can't grasp that with the northern end because everything is set back from the road, with no crossroads, and all types of potential traffic issues. If you're talking about behind the brewery to go to the Post Office, that could all be blocked out in a 'village' manner eventually. Then you have places like White Heron, which is already kind of showing that. Extending that down to Bolt Hill Road makes more sense to me.

Mr. Feldman said to keep in mind not just 5 or 10 years down the road but 30 or 40 years down the road. You want to start now; that I hear what you're saying about that segment of road being what it is but what could it be 25 or 30 years from now.

Mr. Shiner said that, when I look at Route 236, I think of a bisecting artery that totally divides the Town. And, as you go north to south, it's really like three 'nodes because, once you come into Town, all the way down to roughly Depot there's that long straight-away where everyone goes mad fast, except when the Waldorf School has the 15-mph light flashing. You see brake lights and almost rearends all the time. That's the north 'node'. Then it goes from there all the way down to Beech as like the central 'node'. Then the 'node' we've been talking about that goes down to the Kittery border, the southern 'node', if you will. I think, if you're going to take a really high-level look at this from a comprehensive standpoint, to Mr. Feldman's point, it can creep from the north

down to the south, as well as from the south up, to meet in the middle, if you will. So, I think that whatever you're talking about for that southern section, I have my eyes fixed on how quickly it could adapt to that central and that virgin northern area.

Ms. O'Connor said that I like the way you did southern, central, north; that that helps to narrow down the actual buildings we are talking about. There are a couple of developments in there where you drive in, there's a parking lot, and there are fifteen small businesses in there. There are two structures adjacent to each other and another is very close by. That, to me, may be something that we could do that walkable situation. You could have parking but some kind of walkway that would let you go among those three places. If the zoning was a little different, that is somewhere where it could be a mixed commercial/retail, and that would be real nice. There could be food providers or small retail or small shops, as well as small businesses, and that would be, I think, what people are asking for.

Mr. Latter said yes; that right now it's a lot of light industry.

Ms. O'Connor commented about how we could think about migrating from that very commercial/industrial feel to something that is commercial/retail/residential, or really small commercial/retail/residential.

Mr. Shiner added that they're not isolated, either. It's not like I can't see it. It's right there but I can't get there unless I go back out onto Route 236.

Ms. O'Connor said that this is helpful. The idea that there are walkable 'nodes' connected to walkable 'nodes'. That language was like a lightbulb for me.

Mr. Shiner added that, once you get there and park, you can do two or three things.

Mr. Latter said that, that said, we do want to make sure we maintain an element of light industrial. Those are good paying jobs within the community.

Ms. Braun said that there is no reason why parts of Route 236 couldn't have mixed use, like apartment buildings with retail space. York has done one on Route 1 where they have three-story, single homes in the back and the lower level is strictly retail; that in the front, there are a couple of businesses and there is parking. Also, Kittery did one across from Carl's, which I think is very-well done. I don't see any reason why Eliot can't adopt something like that, which I think would answer a lot of concerns that I hear from the community.

Mr. Feldman said to keep in mind that you said you want to keep light industrial. That is clearly an important factor but a light industrial use doesn't have to look light industrial. The façade of the building is the outside. What the function is inside could be light industrial of some sort but the building, look, and feel could be very New England-style.

Mr. Shiner said that, to your point, the skin of the building can be whatever you want it to be. The bones will always be light industrial-style for obvious reasons. Whereas, a lot of times you talk about anchor stores, or businesses to anchor an activity in an area. I don't think it is necessarily that we want to talk about anchoring other than it's the anchoring of a use in that it's going to be retail mixed with light industrial, for example. And it could be that, if you had stall-type stores, small square footage stores, and if there is a variety it's always interesting. But mixed within that, they're perhaps not all small, stall-styles. There could be some larger stores that would be attractive for other reasons, like the grocery store, that you'd want to put in. They would complement because that larger space is kind of the center of the universe for them and the stalls are more like the satellite locations around that are complimentary. Maybe a drycleaner or beauty shop, etc. and gives you the ability to stay in Town and to pull up into a location and go to multiple locations to do your business. My thought is that the anchoring factor is its convenience but it's styles of things that happen there, the types of things that happen there.

Mr. Brubaker said that I think it's going to be different approaches to different parts of the corridor. In terms of the different 'nodes', I think what's been said is a really good start and we're going to have a different approach to each of the identifying 'nodes' in there. So, I think it's good to mention, here, just the extent of the water and sewer project right now. That will go up to Julie Lane and goes all the way down to Bolt Hill. Right now, the section from Beech to Bolt Hill already has water service available but it doesn't have municipal (public) sewer service. It has a private sewer line and property owners can engage with Eliot Commons to tap into the private one. It will soon be getting municipal sewer service up to Beech Road. Then, from Beech Road, north, really from Passamaquoddy Lane, north, which is where the other Prime Storage is and near the Dollar General, that's going to be a sewer line from there up to Julie Lane. Previously there had been the thought of Arc Road, and that is still anticipated, but has just been deferred to the future.

Mr. Latter asked is there an ultimate capacity of sewerage treatment, if we were willing to go fund the infrastructure cost, how far could we run sewer up Route 236, based on the capacity of the treatment not the cost of the project.

Mr. Brubaker said that that came up recently with the car wash discussions. But, overall, what the Town did in the 20/21 timeframe was to approach Kittery to amend the intermunicipal agreement (IMA) to double the Town's capacity at the wastewater treatment plant. This was done in anticipation of the TIF project, the water & sewer project being done, then opening up for uses.

Mr. Latter said that, as the water & sewer project exists now, is a settled matter. You could wish it did other things but it's not going to. But, if you're looking out 25, 35, 40 years, there may be a capacity at some point in the future if the Town so desires. To me, the water & sewer is the most limiting factor on any kind of density along that corridor.

Mr. Brubaker said that, long term, there could be some capacity constraints. But, for the foreseeable future, we're in a good spot with regard to capacity. There are thoughts of what we could plan for in the mid-term future, such as moving even further up Route 236 with water & sewer.

Mr. Latter asked if there was anything north of there.

Ms. Bennett said no; that South Berwick doesn't even have sewer in their commercial/industrial area near the high school.

Mr. Brubaker said, thinking about that, obviously a part of this is what Mr. Feldman said about lower minimum lot sizes; that that will be enabled primarily for the parcels where there will be opportunity for sewer.

Mr. (Dan) Rawling, Roger's Point Drive, said that I'm just recently getting up to speed on the work being done on the Comp Plan. I like very much what I've seen and I would like to be involved with how to shape it to make Eliot the best it can be here. I'm very pleased to hear this discussion. There were a lot of things I wanted to talk about. Talking about Route 236, I feel re-zoning it now is a little premature without knowing what should happen with that road. One is what the future of that road is going to be, whether it will be expanded or diminished, just get a clear idea of what would be happening here. Community involvement might be a little bit limited (State-owned road). Perhaps a second part of that is to remember we built Route 236 just as much as we built some of our other favorite places that we have, start to look at places we like, enjoy, where we want to go to, where we want to spend our time. Get some examples of those, gather them, and start to model the land use patterns here, with the arrangements of buildings, and see how that might work if applied to development in these areas. The second part I wanted to talk about is a little broader with the Comp Plan development. I think we saw some really good input and results from everything, But to me, when I look at it, it's a series of dots and dashes and lines, and it's not very clear how it really fits and what's in the Town of Eliot. I really feel that another layer of study is needed, perhaps, to take that data and apply it to the Town maps, start to do some studies with what we have to work with, see how these parts, fully integrated, apply to the area. Start doing some studies of 5- and 10-minute walks, what does that get us to from here and there. Ways of reducing our traffic footprint. Start to make the places more connected, and everything. And I really feel that this step to at least start to get some of these pieces on a piece of paper, something we can look at, is critical to being able to organize and then think of what is needed for zoning in these areas. What are we going to do to protect special natural areas. How does that link with connecting other natural areas. How do we connect our neighborhoods to our centers. How do we get connected with the Transportation systems. It is sometimes called a charrette but I just call them design development with the Comp Plan with what would be, perhaps, the most important step to be writing in zoning.

Ms. Bennett said that I appreciate everything you've just mentioned. It's like you've been listening in to some of our conversations around the Comp Plan and also this exercise we wanted to start now. As Mr. Feldman mentioned, and we are fully aware, we can't

change any zoning without the support and guidance of the Comp Plan. So, a lot of what we've discussed is that this process in really looking at the form and doing a hybrid form-based approach would involve a form of charrette where people, not just the PB, but also members of the community, look at a map. Start to talk about where the walking patterns might be. What are the possibilities on some of these properties, the ones that are already built, which ones offer some in-fill and what that might look like. How we might connect this sort of mini village zone we've been talking about between Bolt Hill and Beech Road. How do we connect that to our actual Town center. And we have a sidewalk project, a walkable connection, trying to be made between that Beech Road/Route 236 to here at the center of Town. It's something that is going to be brought up with the Comp Plan Committee but we thought that we could dovetail this work in with a larger visioning with maps and more individuals around the table in the near future. The PB can think in terms, as we're comfortable with some of the nuts and bolts, of uses and other things and how we would go about the process.

Mr. Rawling said that particularly with linkage I think it's important that you address the whole area. And even if you can't connect things or don't have money or aren't doing a project right now, you'll at least know not to build a new building on top of your park, as an example.

Ms. Bennett agreed, saying that that's really the role of the Comp Plan and why we have these different committees that are, right now, really working within their subject matter. We are coming up to the phase where we will be coming together to talk about goals, policies, and strategies as a group. Then, informing each other and talking about which ones are going to rise to the top and if there are any big ideas that emerge.

Mr. Latter said that there is a synergy between the PB and the Comp Plan Committee. We're integrated.

Mr. Rawling said that what I'm pushing for is trying to get something on paper right now and conceptualizing individual parcels. If anything, that's what you want with Eliot. There's a lot of different lots and there's nothing cohesive or coherent.

Mr. Latter said that I think that's where the vision comes in. In my experience, I've seen Comp Plans in the past and that is the overriding visions. You put it out there and developers kind of throw a gauzy vision of it and think how they can make a profit and show this gauzy vision to everybody that complies with the Comp Plan. 'This' is a great idea. It's not a bad thing. Let's be honest, the Town doesn't have the money to develop. You need private money to come in. It's important to get this stuff down. It's also important to get the zoning right as the water & sewer comes on line. Otherwise, we're going to end up with what people can do by right instead of what we might want to incentivize people to do otherwise.

Ms. Bennett said that I know your background, Mr. Rawlings, but could you offer up what you've done as a professional.

Mr. Rawling said that I'm retired now from architectural landscape design. I worked in Portsmouth since 1997. We sold property there, apartment buildings. I was involved in a lot of the citizen groups in Portsmouth. I was on the historic board for about 10 years. And I used to work with the Planning Department pretty regularly, reworking a lot of their zoning, particularly their gateway districts, which is somewhat similar to Route 236. In doing those things, one of the things I did was transpose land development patterns in downtown Portsmouth onto the Lafayette Road and reversed it in two, which is a very striking thing to find out that we used the Lafayette Road guidelines and standards all of the downtown Portsmouth would only need a couple shopping malls. So, the whole character and the place that everybody loves to go, and it couldn't even exist. It would just be this bleak character.

Ms. Bennett thanked him for coming, saying that, hopefully, we can engage you more in the Comp Plan. We are trying to keep this meeting to 7PM, and if there are no other questions, I would like to ask Mr. Feldman if you have any suggestions on next steps. How do we outline our process. Should we all schedule a meeting where we all sit down with a map or bring some pictures of building styles that we like to discuss. What would you say is our next step with the thought that we want to bring this forward to a charrette sometime in the next six months.

Mr. Feldman said that I think it could dovetail together with the Comp Plan because you want this information in the Plan to be able to justify it. You're going to have a future land use map, if you will, as part of your plan and that would identify a growth area, not necessarily specifically a village zone, but a growth area, or areas. I think the idea of three 'nodes' or two 'nodes' makes a lot of sense, so, you want to make sure that finds its way into the Comp Plan piece. I also think you can go along a parallel track, knowing that hopefully that's where the plan is going to be and start looking at the issues that you just mentioned about look and feel of buildings. What do we want to see in our design regulations or guidelines, whatever it's going to end up being. Is the stuff I gave you in the document that I gave you good, is it not good, do you want to see something different, and can you get photo examples of what you want. I know the Northern New England Chapter of the American Planning Association has on their website pictures of well-designed buildings throughout New England – Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont. Start looking at that and also start talking about the use issue. I think it's important that you have a mix of uses, including those light industrial uses, and the skin of the building as was mentioned, doesn't have to look industrial. You can still encourage that type of use but have the building look different. In Cumberland or Yarmouth, there is a self-storage facility up there and they had the developer make those buildings, from the roadway, look like barns. They have barn doors, cupolas, and does not look like a typical self-storage facility. I think there are things you can do and still encourage a mix of development to occur. So, don't shy away from that simply because you want to encourage mixed development. I think there are ways to do it without jeopardizing the economy of the Town by having just retail or just residential. You can incorporate a mix and there's no reason why that shouldn't happen.

The PB thanked Mr. Feldman for attending and his input.

ITEM 7 – OLD BUSINESS - None

ITEM 8 – REVIEW AND APPROVE MINUTES - None

ITEM 9 – OTHER BUSINESS/CORRESPONDENCE - None

- A. Updates, if available: Ordinance Subcommittee, Comprehensive Plan, Town Planner, Board Member.**

ITEM 10 – SET AGENDA AND DATE FOR NEXT MEETING

The next regular Planning Board Meeting is scheduled for January 23, 2024 at 6 PM.

ITEM 11 – ADJOURN

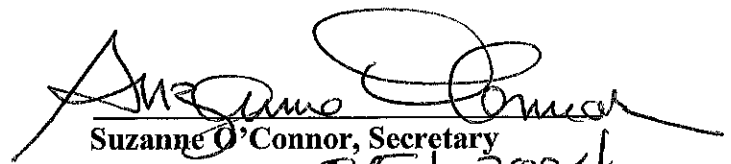
Ms. Braun moved, second by Mr. Shiner, that the Planning Board adjourn.

VOTE

5-0

Motion approved

The meeting adjourned at 7 PM.


Suzanne O'Connor, Secretary
Date approved: 8 Feb 2024

Respectfully submitted,

Ellen Lemire, Recording Secretary