

**COMPREHENSIVE PLAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CPAC)
REGULAR MEETING**

MINUTES OF MARCH 11, 2009

As Approved

Present:

Members: Kate Bedard, Connie Clancy, Lucia Foley, Bob Gelinas, Martha Johnson, Dale Johnston, Dan Luis, Melissa O'Brien, Martha Terry, and Linda Young (Excused: Mike Fisher, Wendy Kelleher, Jeff Labrecque, Jesse Lytle, Kurt Schenker, and Nathan Therien)

Staff: Richard Harris, Town Planner

Liaisons: Helen Fantini

Public: Several members of the Historic Commission and the Historic District Study Committee

Ms. Young called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. She welcomed everyone in attendance especially the guest resource speakers.

1. Special Resource Speakers

- **Bonnie Parsons and Anne Capra, PVPC – Heritage Landscapes**
- **Christine Bestrup, Town of Amherst – Design Review Boards**

Ms. Bonnie Parsons of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission reviewed the Heritage Landscapes Inventory program. She noted that South Hadley is in the midst of this program and reviewed the research conducted to date and the sites which were identified as “priority landscapes”. As part of this effort, she will detail some recommendations for preservation of these priority landscapes. Results of this effort will be provided to the members of CPAC for their consideration in developing the Comprehensive Plan.

Ms. Christine Bestrup of the Town of Amherst (incorrectly listed on the agenda as the City of Northampton) reviewed the Town’s Design Review Board from its origins to current issues. The DRB was adopted in 1983. However, the DRB grew out of a downtown design study and was given impetus from concern over two commercial buildings. She reviewed the boundaries (geographical and topical) under which the DRB operates.

The Amherst DRB consists of 5 members (they do not have to be town residents and one is currently not a resident): 2 architects, 1 landowner/developer, 1 representative of the Planning Board, and 1 representative of the Historical Commission. Operationally, the DRB does not have any “authority” over a project. While consultation is mandatory, the actual recommendations are advisory to the local permitting board or department (i.e., Building Commissioner, Planning Board, and Zoning Board of Appeals).

While most applicants may appreciate the “free” advice the DRB offers, regional/national corporate institutions sometimes do not like the advice. This institutional opposition may arise from the advice running counter to the standard design templates used by such institutions. She noted several examples where the advice was not “appreciated”. However, many businesses appreciate the advice on how to make the design better – that will enhance customer appeal.

Ms. Bestrup stated that the DRB is appointed by the Selectboard. The review process is typically conducted within the allotted 35 day timeframe. While public hearings are not conducted by the DRB, all of their reviews are conducted in public meetings. There is interplay between the DRB and the Historic Districts. In terms of the scope of the DRB, it focuses on the facades, but can look at building orientation, landscaping, etc. but density is not an area for the DRB.

At the beginning, Ms. Bestrup stated, that the DRB had some rough going. But, over time, the DRB has become better received.

There was discussion about how a DRB could be applied to the Route 116 corridor.

2. Special Resource Speakers

- **Mark Larrow & others, South Hadley Historic Commission**
- **Ann Griffin, Historic District Study Committee**

Mr. Larrow was joined by 3 other members of the South Hadley Historic Commission. He noted that the Commission is appointed by the Selectboard and is a town board (contrasted with the South Hadley Historic Society which is a private, non-profit organization). The Commission may get involved in a variety of activities and issues, some examples include:

- Creating a Local Historic District
- Developing a Demolition Delay Bylaw
- Reviewing of wireless antennae projects (such as Pocket Wireless at Mount Holyoke College)

There were inquiries as to whether density/zoning changes would relate to the Historic Commission’s functions. Generally, density and zoning changes would not relate to the Commission’s activities. Ms. Parsons suggested that a Transfer of Development Rights program could be helpful to promote retention of an historic area’s character. She and Mr. Harris generally explained how a TDR program works.

Suggestions were offered as to the role historic preservation could plan in Falls revitalization. Several persons suggested a need for Falls development standards to protect the area’s character.

Ms. Griffin reviewed the purpose and activities of the Study Committee. She noted that the Committee has conducted a survey and researched the requirements for a

local historic district. It was noted that a local Historic District has different purposes and restrictions/benefits than does a National Historic District.

Ms. Griffin stated that the Study Committee will recommend that the first district be established in the Falls area. However, the proposed district has not yet been mapped. Since the State does not want a local district reduced in size once adopted, the Committee is being careful in delineating the boundaries for the district.

There was discussion regarding the previous effort to create a local historic district. Members also offered caution about proceeding too fast without involving the proposed owners.

Ms. Griffin commented that the Committee will be actively engaged in education of the public and the property owners as to the benefits and requirements of any proposed district. She reviewed some of the limitations to a local historic district's authority and how that runs counter to many misconceptions.

Ms. Young thanked all of the speakers and invited them to stay for the rest of the meeting. However, she noted that the CPAC members would understand if they needed to leave.

3. Planning for Community Gathering – March 18, 2009

Mr. Harris reviewed the proposed concept of a Visual Preference Survey as the focus of the March 18th Community Gathering. He stated that Ms. Hinds is working to finalize the materials for the VPS.

There was discussion regarding the status of the draft plan chapters. It was noted that the Open Space & Recreation draft was missing a lot substance.

4. Upcoming Events

a. Community Gatherings – March 18, 2009 and April 15, 2009

This matter was discussed under item #3.

5. Minutes of Meetings

a. February 4, 2009 Regular Meeting

b. February 25, 2009 Regular Meeting

Motion – Ms. O'Brien moved and Ms. Bedard seconded the motion to approve the minutes of the February 4, 2009 meeting as presented. All members present voted in favor of the motion.

Consideration of the February 25th meeting minutes was deferred.

5. Adjourn

Motion – Ms. Terry moved and Mr. Johnson seconded the motion to adjourn. All members present voted in favor of the motion.

The meeting adjourned at 8:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

As Approved

Richard Harris, Recorder