

Webster Planning Board

Minutes - Meeting of January 4, 2007

Present: Chairman Cliff Broker; selectmen member George Hashem; members Jere Buckley (Secretary), Richard Doucette, and Alan Hofmann; and alternates Tom Mullins, Susan Roman, and Sue Rauth. Also present: Town Secretary Judy Jones, Planning and Zoning Secretary Sarah Carter; and numerous Town residents and other interested parties.

Chairman Broker convened the meeting at 7:03 p.m. Attendance was taken, with the results noted above.

This was a special meeting scheduled for the purpose of holding a public hearing on proposed zoning ordinance changes. However, Mr. Broker opened the meeting by reporting that, because the posting for the public meeting had been flawed, the meeting would instead take the form of a workshop seeking public input. A formal (and properly posted) public hearing on the subject has been scheduled for 18 January at 7:30 p.m., in conjunction with the Board's regular meeting beginning at 7:00 p.m.

Mr. Broker began the workshop by summarizing the key points of the proposed changes to the *Zoning Ordinance*. He described the division of the Town into two zoning districts... a Pillsbury Lake district and a residential/agricultural district comprising the rest of the Town. He noted the proposal to require a 5-acre minimum lot size on the latter district, with an exception for lots of record of 4 or more acres but less than 10 acres, which will be subdividable into two lots with a minimum lot size of 2 acres. He indicated that the front setback for 5-acre or larger lots will be 100 feet instead of the current 50 feet. He also indicated that a large number of pre-existing lots of record in Town will not be impacted by the proposed changes.

Mr. Buckley explained that the matter under consideration was a zoning ordinance amendment being considered for submission to the March Town Meeting, and that voter approval at that meeting is required for adoption.

Mr. Broker then opened the session for public comment.

Resident Harold Janeway asked what impact the proposed changes would have on the cluster zoning concept, and why a more comprehensive solution had not been proposed. The Board responded that the current *Zoning Ordinance* includes no provision allowing cluster zoning and that the proposed changes would not alter that circumstance. Ms. Roman cited the clear mandate in the Master Plan to retain a rural atmosphere. Mr. Mullins suggested that the Board regards the proposal as an initial step in what will probably be a continuing process, and perhaps the only one politically viable enough to meet with Town approval.

In order to clarify the basis of the Board's proposal, Mr. Mullins read the 10-item "Purpose" statement accompanying the proposed ordinance amendment.

Resident Guy Larochelle expressed his opposition to the proposed expansion of the Cold Springs campground. The Board noted that this is a matter being appealed to the ZBA, has not yet come before the Board, and is not relevant to the proposal under discussion.

Resident M.J. Turcotte questioned the emphasis on higher density in the description of the proposed Pillsbury Lake district in that it may be interpreted as prescriptive. Ms. Roman said the Board could change the wording to be descriptive of the higher density presently existing there.

Resident Dick Foss asked why the Board had selected 5 acres as the minimum lot size for the proposed residential/agricultural zone. Ms. Roman acknowledged that there was no science involved in selecting the 5-acre value but that it was considered by the Board to yield a good blend of existing smaller lots, the qualifying lots, and larger lots in currently undeveloped areas. She cited Master Plan statistics showing the large number of existing smaller lots, both at Pillsbury Lake and elsewhere in Town.

Resident Pat Inman expressed concern that the adoption of the proposed 5-acre minimum new lot size in the residential/agricultural zone could be regarded as "snob zoning" and could make such lots unaffordable to many people, especially young people. Mr. Broker noted that the price of a lot would not increase in direct proportion to lot size.

Mr. John Longill, a builder and the president of the Concord Affordable Home Builders Association, spoke at some length in opposition to the proposed amendment. He indicated that he and his Association are in favor of land conservation but that they also look for a balance between conservation and development and a balance of housing types. He regards the change from 2- to 5-acre minimum lot size as "downzoning" that, given the law of supply and demand, will have the effect of increasing the price of all lots in Town. He cited statistics purporting to show that the median NH salary is already insufficient to allow purchase of a median-price NH residence, and indicated that young people are leaving the State in significant numbers on that account. He feared that only the wealthy will be able to afford 5-acre lots. He recommended the creation of

multiple zones with varied zoning requirements. He also recommended "2-acre mandatory cluster zoning" whereby developers of large tracts would be required to establish the number of residences allowed under 2-acre zoning rules, to cluster that number of residences on a small portion of the tract, and to place the remainder in conservation easement.

Ms. Roman reported that the Board had considered the task of dividing the town into multiple zoning districts and concluded the idea to be impractical and politically unfeasible for Webster. Because of the Blackwater dam project, the Town has no clearly defined town center. Almost all of the Town is either on a hilltop or over a stratified aquifer. Given these constraints, the Board sees no chance of identifying a set of zoning districts that would win a Town vote approval.

Mr. Broker expressed a concern that land place in conservation easement is sometimes not well cared for. Mr. Longill responded that this is a solvable problem.

Ms. Jones reported statistical update data showing the current valuation of 1-acre and 2-acre Webster lots as \$80,000 and \$82,000, respectively.

Resident Justin Fanjoy, citing his own circumstances at age 23, argued that the departure of young people from the State cited by Mr. Longill is due to a lack of suitable jobs, not to a lack of affordable housing.

Mr. Mullins commented that the amendment proposed by the Board reflects the "political reality" of being tailored to what the voters might be willing to accept. He suggested that it is a realistic first step and that other incremental changes may come in the future.

Resident Geoff Martin expressed concern that imposition of a 5-acre minimum lot size may decrease the value of larger tracts because of the smaller number of subdividable lots. Mr. Broker suggested that, because of the overall effect on the character of the Town, this might not be the case.

Mr. Mullins again emphasized that the Board has attempted to take a long view of the situation and to buy some time by taking this proposed first step. He again opined that there is no evident politically viable alternative.

Mr. Janeway asked if the current proposal has been in any way prompted by the status of property on Little Hill. The Board responded that the proposal is based on consideration of the overall best interests of the Town and was not influenced by any single situation.

Resident Roy Fanjoy asked how many buildable 1-acre and 2-acre lots currently exist in Town. He was again referred to the lot-size statistics in the Master Plan. Mr. Mullins suggested that the number of small and affordable lots in Webster is undoubtedly greater than in any surrounding town.

Resident Dee Blake asked if trailers would be allowed on 5-acre lots. The Board responded that the proposed amendment does not alter current regulations re trailers. She also asked when the proposed changes would take effect. Mr. Mullins explained that, once the proposed amendment is posted, matters potentially affected by the proposed amendment would be effectively "on hold" until the Town vote and would be effective as of the posting date if the Town votes in the affirmative.

Resident Mary-Jo MacGowan noted that the proposed amendment makes no reference to commercial uses, and was advised that current regulations on that subject would be unchanged.

Ms. Roman presented statistics from the NHSCC Cost of Community Services Studies comparing property tax revenues and costs of services for various property classifications.

Residents Roy Fanjoy, M.J. Turcotte, Bruce Johnson, and David Klumb all complimented the Board on a sound proposal and on careful consideration of citizen inputs.

There being no further public comment, the meeting was adjourned at 8:07 p.m.

The next regular Board meeting will be at 7:00 p.m. on 18 January 2007. As previously noted, a 7:30 p.m. agenda item at that meeting will be a formal public hearing on the proposed *Zoning Ordinance* amendment.

Respectfully submitted,

Jere D. Buckley, Secretary