

**DRAFT
IMAGINE AMHERST
MEETING NOTES**

PROJECT WORKING COMMITTEE MEETING
MAY 25, 2016

This meeting is being recorded.

Working Committee Attendees: Dal Giuliani, Chair, Ellen Banks, Duncan Black, David Chiazza, Steve Herberger, Brian Kulpa, Gary Palumbo, Frank Pasztor, Ramona Popowich, Dan Ulatowski, Bob White, and Jane Woodward

Absent: Jim Cwierley and Carl Montante, Jr.

Staff Present: Rick Gillert, Gary Black, Dan Howard and Kim Schueler

Dal Giuliani, Chair opened the meeting by thanking the Committee for attending.

Dan Howard, Associate Planner gave a short presentation to explain the purpose of the meeting: for members to gain an understanding of the two Commercial Center Zoning Analysis Memorandums from Code Studio dated May 17, 2016. He stated that members should review them over the next month in order to discuss them at the next meeting. He noted that to date he has not received any comments on the Comprehensive Plan Analysis Memorandum but comments are welcome until the next meeting. He told members to expect a draft outline of the new zoning code sometime in August and that approval from the Town Board regarding the direction of the progress would be sought by Code Studio in September. There will also be a public workshop in late September which will be discussed in more detail during the subsequent presentation.

The Committee viewed a video recording of Lee Einsweiler from Code Studio explaining the Commercial Center Zoning Analysis memorandums (Task 4.2).

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D. Chiazza asked whether or not members should be choosing sites they think should be included at the charrette in September. Dan Howard responded that the Committee will be discussing that at their next meeting.

F. Pazstor asked if there are going to be multiple sites looked at during the charrette? Dan Howard responded that yes, there will be multiple sites, most likely based on the categories laid out by Code Studio in Part 1 of the Commercial Zoning Analysis Memorandum.

E. Banks asked for a color key for the zoning maps. Dan Howard said that staff would compile one for her and any other members that want it.

The Committee began a conversation about the project.

D. Giuliani stated that this project is not meant to reinvent the wheel. It is important that Committee members understand the objectives and are engaged in the process. He stated that for the June meeting there might be a bus tour to some of the centers with all members in order to get first-hand experience and understanding, and to hear everyone's opinions at one time. He noted that the Town does not have much space to develop new centers, so much of the new zoning will be applied to redevelopment of existing centers. One concept that needs to be explored is density. He stated that density can have a negative connotation but it can be a good thing if it is done right. The Committee will want to discuss density and appropriate locations for higher density.

R. Popowich asked if our new zoning code is going to be area specific.

Rick Gillert, Planning Director answered that yes, this project will look at certain centers within the Town and create recommendations about the way those centers should look, and where the new zoning tools should be applied.

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D. Giuliani said that members should worry more about the future zoning than the existing zoning. The new zoning cannot be homogenized and cannot be changed wholesale.

B. Kulpa observed that in some centers, the zoning is very jumbled and haphazard. The zoning may try to accommodate all types of uses, but that the characteristics and aesthetics of the centers should also be looked at. We also should not worry too much about non-conforming uses because if the new code is successful, those will change over time when they are redeveloped. The Town may have to speculate some about the future economic markets, and establish new rules in order to set a new tone to get the character the Town and the community desires.

G. Palumbo suggested that the Town should not chase away those that are non-conforming, but that the Plan and the new code should explicitly explain these new centers.

D. Ulatowski explained that the legal action comes from the zoning and it should coincide to the future vision in the Plan. All the Town has left are small, difficult areas for development that just do not work with the current zoning code. He expressed his opinion that there should be less zoning districts with rules that accommodate the difficulties and types of development desired.

D. Giuliani asked members to consider that the Town may not be as auto-oriented in the future - or maybe it will remain the same – but that we need to look into the future in case things change.

G. Palumbo agreed but stated that the low-density single-family development nature of the Town has already been established so it may be hard for the Town to change drastically.

D. Giuliani stated that another trend is that seniors and younger people are looking for more density and more dense places to live. Mixed use may be the best option in some places to accommodate the density desired.

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S. Herberger suggested that the Committee may be getting ahead of itself in that it needs to be looking at what is not currently working with our centers, what is working elsewhere, and then develop concepts/characteristics we would like to see in some centers. Code Studio will then take our concepts and ideas and write the code to produce those desired centers.

G. Palumbo stated that he would like to talk about height and asked if we are going higher for the sake of mixed use. If so, and we find a place to test it out, we need to be careful regarding the transitions into the neighborhood.

D. Giuliani stated that the Town may not have produced all great things – not everyone may have liked every planning decision made in the past - but from a legal standpoint there are many aspects of projects that are permitted under the zoning code. If we do not like the types of development we are getting, we need to change some things in the code.

He noted that people develop a jargon, whether it be businessmen or planners or developers, but often things need to be simplified so that residents and lay people who are not familiar with these terms and concepts understand the project.

Gary Black, Assistant Planning Director, stated that for this project we are looking at all the commercial and mixed use centers in the Town and right now many of them have the same zoning and are producing things that may not be context-sensitive. Some of these centers can have the same zoning districts. Clearfield Plaza is a good example in that much of it is classified as a lot of General Business (GB) but we may not want certain uses or aspects there such as those on Transit Road. This “one size fits all” commercial zoning we have in many places can enable less desirable development.

J. Woodward stated she agreed, that General Business (GB) should not be everywhere.

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G. Black explained that our current zoning code was developed in the 1970s when there was a lot of greenfield development and districts were located where it was thought growth would occur, but that not necessarily how they would work together with the neighborhoods around them.

He mentioned the Hopkins and Klein center as an example; that it is auto-oriented and probably will be for the foreseeable future because it is in a neighborhood where people will likely need to drive to it, but it is possible to make it more pedestrian-friendly and walkable for those that are close by. Auto-oriented transportation will not go away, but the Town can do it better. Each center can have characteristics and guidelines regarding what our vision is for them (this vision should be stated in the Comp Plan) and then the zoning code becomes the legal means to achieve those guidelines and characteristics we want.

J. Woodward suggested it can be easy to write about the characteristics and guidelines desired, but it can be difficult to manage because everything is already mostly developed.

G. Black acknowledged that it is challenging, but part of this process involves the charrette week which attempts to get more buy-in and agreement between the community and developers.

D. Chiazza stated that he participated in the Comprehensive Plan process which involved a concept called smart growth which was the trend then but may not be today. Change can be disruptive but is sometimes necessary. He stated that not everyone participates in these projects and they react only when something changes in their neighborhood or close to them. It is important that this Committee and this project be transparent and inclusive to make sure that everyone possible can participate, but not everyone will always agree - there is a balance needed.

D. Giuliani stated that the June meeting will likely be a tour with a worksheet for members to write down their thoughts and ideas. He also explained that there may be a July meeting, even though one is not currently scheduled. He asked members if anyone had any comments or

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changes for the notes from the meeting of April 26, 2016. No objections or comments were made.

Notes from the Committee Meeting of 4/26/16 meeting were accepted.

PUBLIC SPEAKERS

Thomas Frank

Pleased with the Code Studio presentation and speaker, Lee.

Jim Tricoli

Lives in Williamsville and cannot walk to the new hotels. Asked when there is an empty store, is there some sort of pressure that can be put on the owners to do something with their storefront?

Don Smith

Noted several responsibilities of the Committee described in the Public Outreach Plan. Asked who is determining what is wanted and needed? Stated that the Public Outreach Plan is deficient and that the Committee may not represent the entire community.

Mary Shapiro

The Town is very diverse and has many different types of centers. We should not be changing just for the sake of change – some things should remain the same if they are working well. One big problem is that there is a lack of pedestrian infrastructure or bicycle lanes in many of these centers, and just adding smaller pedestrian infrastructure instead of changing the whole center may improve those areas.