

**C O D E S T U D I O**

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Daniel Howard, Town of Amherst Planning Director

**FROM:** Lee D. Einsweiler

**DATE:** March 31, 2019

**RE:** Planning Board Hearing Notes - March 26, 2019 (NYSERDA Task 8.1)

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The Consultant presented at a Public Hearing before the Planning Board on Tuesday, March 26, 2019 at 6:30pm in the Town Hall Council Chambers to explain the changes to the Plan Amendment (Task 6.2) and Draft Zoning Code (Task 7.6). All six Planning Board Members were in attendance. Supervisor Brian Kulpa and Lee Einsweiler from Code Studio made the presentations.

The meeting was intended to inform attendees about changes to the existing Zoning Code in order to implement the Comprehensive Plan Amendment which was approved in December 2017. These changes include taking the various forms and types of centers developed in the Comprehensive Plan and coding them so that they fit with the surrounding neighborhood context and in some cases creates a new sense of place in larger areas that typically do not contain special character already.

Supervisor Kulpa made a presentation about the planning initiatives and comprehensive planning to set the context for the draft Code provisions.

Code Studio reviewed the two overriding categories for new commercial and mixed-use zoning districts: Traditional/Infill and Suburban/Retrofit.

- » For Traditional/Infill districts, the intent is to utilize existing, older neighborhood context in already developed, denser areas and infill smaller parcels to match valued architectural characteristics of the area. This is done by requiring buildings be pulled up to the street to create more walkable places, and also having new development go through an architectural review process through and advisory Architectural Review Board.
- » For Suburban/Retrofit districts, the intent is to also introduce and impose some architectural standards to create a new sense of place. This can also be done by breaking up larger commercial/shopping centers into smaller blocks by the creation of new streets (built to Town/public standards). These new blocks would function in a more traditional form with buildings pulled up close to create “core streets” that are more pedestrian-oriented and scaled and which include active green space as well. The exterior of these sites would get different frontages based on the street classification.

It was explained that the grant with NYSERDA is concluding at the end of March but that there is still some work to be done in order to get these changes to the Zoning Code adopted by the Town Board in the following months.

The following is a summary of various questions and comments from this public hearing.

Planning Board Public Hearing (video recorded & visible on the Town's website)

Tuesday, March 26, 2019

6:30pm – 8:00pm

The following are comments and discussions from the Hearing:

About how long could it take for this type of development to occur?

- » The Town intends to move forward with adoption and implementation of the new code provisions in the next few months. The Opportunity Zone and the Boulevard Mall areas are places that the Town that will need this zoning– development in these areas could realistically start at that time.

Very informative session that was presented. It really makes the future of the Town seem exciting.

It is a great idea to give the Planning Board a little more discretion when making decisions. This way there can be some influence to better suit the neighborhood and the Town as a whole.

When would this zoning be in place? How do the other planning projects happening in the Town factor into this project, timewise?

- » This zoning informs many of the planning projects happening in the Town right now so it is important to get the districts in place as soon as we can to start influencing better development practices. We'd also like to consider doing the Retrofit districts or some other form in the larger office districts in Town.

How does the Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) and rail extension projects that the NFTA is working on fit into this?

- » The NFTA is well aware of what we are doing with the Plan and the Zoning Code. Over the past several months we have been working closely with them to make sure both sides are informed of what the project outcomes are or will be. The alignment and how it traverses the mall site will develop over time.

A suggestion was made to make story height a threshold for minor site plans – over two stories should go to the Planning Board for approval.

How did we get to 5 stories and 8 stories?

- » The project was informed by the Charrette and early public meetings. Although most of the Town will not exceed 3 stories or about 35 feet, there are some centers in Town that are isolated and not adjacent to residential that are great places to allow and encourage density. Those places mainly along the I-290 corridor, such as the Golden Triangle and the Ridge Lea Campus, have always been talked about as being up to 8 stories.

How can the Town support all this desired development from a population and economic standpoint?

- » UB students have a lot to do with the demand for housing in the area. Along with that, students want real places where they can live and also shop. This is why encouraging mixed use is important. This way the development allows for student housing and takes the pressure off single-family homes being bought by students and changing the character of neighborhoods. Senior housing will also be sought after in the coming years because of the aging population. Incentives

like the Opportunity Zone funding will also create high demand for density, especially with the new zoning and possible incentives. New transit through the Town also creates transit-oriented development opportunities.

We should have an analysis done to see what the market can handle in the Town.

It may be hard to put an access road behind very shallow lots.

Core Streets and the creation of blocks are good ideas – having just one central green space is ok but having green throughout the site may be more appealing and help with stormwater reduction.

How would the review process change under this code and would it change the relationship with the public?

- » There may be more minor site plans if the threshold is increased, but those can always be subject to Planning Board approval should the Planning Department deem it necessary. There will still be public hearings before the Board so the public will have adequate input opportunities. There may be more opportunity for public input before an Architectural Review Board as well.