

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: Stakeholder Meeting Notes - March 14/15, 2019 (NYSERDA Task 7.4)

The Town held two stakeholder meetings to explain the Draft Code changes developed under Task 7.2. The first meeting targeted developers and was held on Thursday, March 14, 2019 at 9:00am in the Town Hall Council Chambers. There were 15 people in attendance. The second meeting targeted the Amherst Chamber of Commerce was held on Friday, March 15, 2019 at 8:30am at Wendel Companies and it also had 15 people in attendance.

The meetings were 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.

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 advance these changes to the Zoning Code for consideration and adoption by the Town Board in the following months.

The presentation included information on the Comprehensive Plan Amendment (specifically Figure 6-A with new center designations), and how the Zoning Review Working Group has been working with those designations. Code Studio created 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 proposed developments undergo an architectural review process administered through an 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 by creating “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 classifications described in the Comprehensive Plan.

The following is a summary of various questions and comments from these two stakeholder meetings.

Stakeholder Meeting – Developers (video recorded & visible on the Town’s website)

Thursday, March 14, 2019

9:00am – 10:00am

QUESTIONS / COMMENTS:

How do these new development regulations apply to the Boulevard Mall site? Could these new block and street regulations be done all at once?

- » There may be a phasing on larger sites such as the Boulevard Mall. This really depends on the number of parcels and their ownership – the more parcels with multiple owners, the more phasing this will require. Out parcels may come first with larger redevelopment occurring after infrastructure is in place. The Opportunity Zone in the Town is something that could help spur larger development on some of these sites. These new regulations will require the Town to really think about its desires for the future or larger commercial areas and have pre-submittal meetings with property owners and developers in order to express their desires and to work with them on a product that fits the objectives of the Town as expressed in the Code.

The Consumer Square Plaza is currently not dense – how are areas like these going to be addressed?

- » Places like these were built using the existing code which requires a lot of parking. It is a very successful commercial area in the region and it is likely that it will remain for some time. Although it does not have the density we would like to see in the future, it does have great landscaping elements, connectivity via sidewalks, and public spaces and amenities for pedestrians. It was a step in the right direction and has some very desirable characteristics. For places like the Ridge Lea Campus just to the east, we would like to see some similar elements with an increase in density.

Will the new code address street issues (such as realigning some that are offset) and have better architectural standards?

- » The Town will be creating an Architectural Review Board which will require that most if not all site plans (commercial or mixed-use plans) are subjected to review to ensure they are meeting the goals of the Town through these new regulations. The board will be advisory and is not anticipated to add additional time to the review process. Members will include design and architecture professionals who have the skills to recommend and review plans. A key is that developers work with the Town before they submit a project to coordinate efforts and objectives.

What is the Town looking for when they say “mixed-use” as this can be a broad description?

- » All types of mixed-use are desired. Usually the Town sees more horizontal mixed-use on a site or within an area. If there are new parking requirements that have decreased the amount required and there are new blocks or streets created to break up areas, we are hoping to encourage higher density. With that likely comes added height and various uses within one building. With the new code it is really focusing on influencing the form of development and less emphasis on regulating the use.

Stakeholder Meeting – Amherst Chamber of Commerce

Friday, March 15, 2019

8:30am – 9:30am

QUESTIONS / COMMENTS:

How would this work when working with developers?

- » The Town would expect to have pre-application meetings for those interested in a new project. This way the Town can convey its desires and review the new regulations before a site plan is submitted. This will help with the review process so that plans do not get held up by making numerous changes to the form or architecture.

How does the Amherst Industrial Development Agency fit in with these new regulations?

- » The Amherst IDA works closely with the Town to implement the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan. These proposed zoning changes were prepared through guidance from the Plan. The Town is working with the IDA to formulate tools that can be used to encourage redevelopment that includes increased densities and new street systems. As an example the Town and IDA may implement incentives like a PILOT increment financing program (PIF) to incentivize density and architectural forms that are desired.

Would this help to encourage small business?

- » The Town is hoping to spur redevelopment in Town to better fit surrounding context. The new zoning encourages multiple uses in smaller areas and better architecture and scale, and therefore would hopefully be more attractive to business owners. Much of what we see developed today are large big box stores or strip plazas. Encouragement of mixed-use, breaking up facades, and creating “places”, will create a more prosperous and attractive environment for those smaller business. Younger generations and residents desire smaller coffee shops and unique stores in smaller places; zoning should enable this form and bring more clientele.