

CODE STUDIO

MEMORANDUM

TO: Daniel Howard, Town of Amherst Planning Director

FROM: Lee D. Einsweiler

DATE: March 31, 2019

RE: Joint Workshop Notes - March 18, 2019 (NYSERDA Task 8.1)

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The Town held a joint Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals workshop to explain the proposed Comprehensive Plan Amendment and Draft Code changes developed under Tasks 6.2 and 7.6. This was conducted at a Town Board Work Session on Monday, March 18, 2019 at 4:00pm in the Town Hall Council Chambers. Two members of the Zoning Board of Appeals and four members of the Planning Board were in attendance. Because this was held at a Town Board Work Session, all five members of the Town Board were also present.

The meeting was intended to inform attendees about proposed 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 preparing zoning code language to encourage development that fits 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 get these changes to the Zoning Code adopted by the Town Board in the coming months.

The presentation included information on the Comprehensive Plan Amendment (Task 6.2) (specifically Figure 6-A with new center designations), and how the Zoning Review Working Group has slightly rethought these 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 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.

The following is a summary of various questions and comments from this joint workshop.

Joint Planning Board & Zoning Board of Appeals Workshop (video recorded & visible on the Town's website)

Monday, March 18, 2019

4:00pm – 5:00pm

QUESTIONS / COMMENTS:

So the new districts aim to be more context sensitive?

- » Yes. Right now the existing code is mostly one-size-fits-all, with the General Business (GB) district acting the same in more traditional places like Snyder and more suburban places like Transit Road. The new code aims to have new development fit better with the surrounding character, or in some cases create a new character that mimics the more traditional form.

When you talk about these retrofit places with new blocks being created, do you mean that likely we would want to be attracting smaller businesses?

- » It would be a goal to create more “Main Street-like” places where people feel safe and comfortable walking. With changing markets, there is less desire for large retail spaces, so yes these new spaces are likely to be smaller and to be more flexible to allow for many different types of uses to inhabit them. With younger residents and consumers, more niche businesses tend to do well, and these are typically in a mixed-use environment.