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03/06/2014 Minutes

Arlington Master Plan Advisory Committee

Central School, Lower Level – 6:30 PM

Main Room - 7:30 PM

Minutes: March 6, 2014

Approved: April 10, 2014

Members present: Ann LeRoy, Charles Kalaskas, Harris Band, Carol Svenson, Greg Bowe, Sheri Baron, Bob Radochia, Joe Barr

Members absent: Monica Tibbits-Nutt, Eric Bourassa, Pam Heidell

Also present: Consultant Judi Barrett of RKG; Laura Wiener, Ted Fields, and Joey Glushko of the Planning Dept. Sign-in sheets at the 730 PM public presentation indicated that about twelve residents were in attendance.

The meeting was called to order at 630 PM in the Lower Level meeting room. At onset, there was not a quorum of the committee; late arrivals created a quorum and the minutes of February 26, 2014 were amended and approved, at the end of the Lower Level meeting.

Charlie Kalaskas opened the meeting; he announced that Monica Tibbits-Nutt has resigned from the group, as she is moving from the community. The committee began a discussion on the Public Facilities and Services working paper. More than one commented on the confusion regarding open space and recreation topical discussion in this working paper, as opposed to the material being presented in the proposed May topic area of Open Space, Recreation, and Cultural and Natural Resources; overlap of these topics is acknowledged.

It was recognized that maintenance of properties is an issue; responsibilities for many properties is under the DPW – and yet there would seem to be not enough staff/funding for this Town Department to carry out needed maintenance. Documents say that the Town owns 42 properties, considered a large number of buildings to operate and maintain; some are held for the building use, others because of the value of the land. Some feel that it does not make sense for the Town to be a “landlord” with the responsibilities of leasing/ rents/ maintenance. The options, among others, might be landbanking of some of the properties, redevelopment, or even sale. The Committee discussed the need to establish a process to examine whether some town owned buildings should be declared surplus and then disposed of; it would need consider the costs and benefits of each property.

The group discussed the Town’s role of supplying cemetery space for residents in the future; there was a sense that a policy regarding this issue should be developed.

At 7:15 PM the committee adjourned, to re-convene in the Main Room for the Housing Working Paper presentation.

About a dozen residents joined the committee here. At 7:30 PM Judi Barrett of RKG presented an over-view of the Housing Working Paper, followed by a discussion of selected questions (Working Paper is available on-line; see following questions).

Following are the questions selected for discussion, accompanied by some of the public comments from the meeting for each question:

- 1) Should the town allow no housing in the business districts, or limit housing to projects that also include commercial, or continue its present zoning policy of allowing residential development in commercial zones by special permit?
 - a. Will mixed use development bring in more tax money?

- b. Residential development should not replace businesses;
- c. Mixed use zoning is good for traffic control;
- d. Government/zoning should encourage mixed use in some commercial areas;
- e. What do developers want to build? What is the market for commercial vis a vis residential?
- f. Arlington has mainly small businesses, who cannot take on the tax burden;
- g. Consider what zoning allows, vs. what is encouraged;
- h. Encourage housing with access to transit and shopping.

2) As a maturely developed suburb, Arlington is substantially – but not fully – built out. What types of housing do you think the Town could use more of than it has today, and where should that housing be built?

- a. Change zoning to allow more “infill”
- b. Don’t let parking dominate development issue;
- c. Concern for densification;
- d. Transit oriented development, especially at the low market end.

3) Concerns re Chapter 40B Development. Should it be an affordable housing priority for Arlington to “get to” 10 percent – or 1.5 percent of land area– or should the town focus instead on addressing its own housing needs? (These are not mutually exclusive aims, but they are not the same. A town could comply with one of the statutory minima and still not meet local needs for affordable housing.)

- a. Viable alternatives for seniors are needed;
- b. Accessory apartments are desirable alternative to allow “aging in place”;
- c. Need to control our own housing needs.

4) Affordability is one type of housing problem that a master plan can address, but it isn’t the only housing problem – and other problems may be as important, if not more important, to Arlington residents. Considering your neighbors, your friends, people who’ve recently moved into or out of Arlington, or others, what kinds of housing problems or needs do you think should be priorities for the master plan?

- a. Diversity of the population;
- b. Aging of the population;
- c. Changing definition of family unit;
- d. Affordability;
- e. Age and size of housing units;
- f. Type of housing units – rent/own. The Town is losing low end ownership opportunities.

5) Concerns about large expansions/alterations, teardowns, and mansionization of single- family homes have also surfaced during the master plan process. What is the problem? Is it the sheer size of the new/altered house? Is it architectural styles that are incompatible with the rest of the neighborhood? Is it loss of traditionally affordable housing? Or some other problem? Being clear about the problem is important for crafting an effective solution. Can you think of any benefits that teardowns bring to neighborhoods or the Town?

- a. Preservation of landscaping and trees;
- b. Aesthetics and massing;
- c. Value and quality of housing stock;
- d. Impact on abutting properties;
- e. Clarify(redefine) the way “height” is measured.

6) If you could nominate three places in Arlington for a “most livable neighborhood” award, what places would you choose? Why? What qualities do they have that make them particularly good places to live?

- a. East Arlington, the Heights, and Northwest areas were specifically mentioned as “livable neighborhoods.”
- b. These qualities were specifically mentioned: walkability, easy access to public transit and shopping, nearness to parkland(s) and schools, strong sense of neighborhood.

The meeting adjourned at 915PM
Minutes submitted by Joey Glushko