

MEETING NOTES - JOINT WORKSHOP
HILLSBOROUGH TOWN BOARD and PLANNING BOARD

Tuesday, February 27, 2007
6:00 PM, Big Barn Convention Center

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Mayor Tom Stevens, Commissioners Frances Dancy, Mike Gering, L. Eric Hallman, and Brian Lowen.

PLANNING BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Tom Campanella, Edna Ellis, Kathleen Faherty, Neil Jones, Paul Newton, Eric Oliver, Dave Remington, Toby Vandemark, and Barrie Wallace.

STAFF PRESENT: Town Manager Eric Peterson, Assistant Town Manager/Public Works Director Demetric Potts, Planning Director Margaret Hauth, Planner Stephanie Trueblood, and Town Attorney Bob Hornik.

6:00 PM **Public review of presentation boards and other information made available by the applicant.**

7:00 PM **Open Joint Workshop of the Town Board and Planning Board.**

Mayor Stevens called the Workshop to order at 7:01 p.m. He welcomed all those attending and explained the purpose of the Joint Planning Workshop, noting it was a “pre-submission” to the application process and would allow the applicant to get feedback in a conversational setting prior to submission of the application. Mayor Stevens then described the three-part format that would be used, stating that Planning Director Margaret Hauth would provide an overview of the application process, Joe Dye, the applicant, would provide a presentation on the preliminary plans for the site, and lastly there would be a question and answer session between the Town Board, the Planning Board, and the applicant.

Mayor Stevens remarked that comments from the public would not be heard tonight; however, comment cards were provided so that the public could make preliminary observations prior to the public hearing next month.

Ms. Hauth explained the three-step process, stating that there was an annexation component, a rezoning component, and then the Master Plan component which was required due to the request for an Entranceway Special Use Permit. She said what was being exhibited tonight was some of the applicant’s preliminary information about the Master Plan which spoke to generalized land uses, building intensities, roads, and other aspects. Ms. Hauth said the public hearing where all of that information would be submitted and considered was tentatively scheduled for March 22 at 7:00 p.m. in the Gordon Battle Courtroom.

Ms. Hauth said once that public hearing was closed and the Town had received all public comments and all technical data required from the applicant, the Planning Board and the Town Board would begin deliberation on the application, the first step being for the Planning Board to formulate a recommendation regarding the concepts of the rezoning and the Master Plan. She said Master Plans could carry conditions, and it was not unreasonable to expect that in this case. Ms. Hauth said then, the Town Board would make the final decision on the annexation, the rezoning, and the Master Plan provisions. She said the process may include more than the one public hearing scheduled in March.

Joe Dye commented that their presentation was broken into three aspects: what now existed on the site, the planning documents already on record, and finally what were some of their plans for the Master Plan and some of its detailed elements. He said with him tonight was Senior Planner Cara Lacey from the John R. McAdams Company, who would speak to some of the detailed aspects of the plan, and Earl Lewellyn, a traffic engineer who would speak to the traffic impact analysis and how it would affect the property.

Mr. Dye described the existing conditions on the site, noting that the largest track of land was the Collins property, which accounted for about 90% of the parcel. He said the approximately 60-acre Boone parcel was about 98% developed with close to 300,000 square feet of multiple uses comprised in various buildings on the property. Mr. Dye said the Partin property, about 5.74 acres, currently contained an older mobile-home facility.

Mr. Dye said an important consideration was the frontage of the property on Churton Street, which amounted to about 900 feet. He said they had then considered the planning documents the Town had looked at over the last several years and how they might affect the property. He said they had considered the Vision 2010 Plan and its elements, the Churton Street Corridor Plan and its detailed view of Churton Street, and the Strategic Growth Plan which provided a comprehensive look at how to focus growth and what to consider when doing so.

Mr. Dye said some of the comment themes throughout these planning documents was enhanced and planned streetscapes, enhanced and designed landscaping, planned signage for a unified appearance, planned traffic management, allocation of water and sewer, and the promotion of tourism. He said those elements and others were used to look at what the site contained today, and what planning documents were available and how they came together to help them focus on a Master Plan that was consistent with the vision for Hillsborough.

Mr. Dye said some of the planning elements they would focus on was recreation and open space opportunities, creating a livable community that was walkable, diverse and functional, respecting the character and charm of Hillsborough, streetscape and landscape perspectives and the existing charm of the Daniel Boone Village, appropriate redevelopment of the Daniel Boone property, and infrastructure including water, sewer and traffic.

Cara Lacey, with the John R McAdams Company, stated they had begun to narrow the focus of the Master Plan using comments received from the open house in November and since. She said that each parcel supported the other and created an overall neighborhood, containing the following elements:

Parcel A – proposed to be a High Intensity Commercial area of approximately 550,000 square feet, which would transition into higher intensity or density apartments and/or medium intensity residential units.

Parcel B – proposed to be Medium Intensity Residential with approximately 6 units per acre, and could have the opportunity for single-family detached or attached homes.

Parcel C – proposed to be High Intensity Residential with approximately 24 units proposed per acre, with townhouses, condominiums and/or apartments.

Parcel D – proposed to be High Intensity Residential with approximately 12 units per acre, or the possibility of office or institutional uses.

Parcel E – the centralized location they had focused on to bring both the north part of the Hillsborough together with the southern portion of Waterstone, and provide a centralized open-space area that could be connected through trails. They have preliminary plans to provide trails along the southern railroad connection as well as throughout the site in order to bring the uses together.

Ms. Lacey stated that once the types of uses were master planned as well as their locations, additional elements were studied to fully create a plan that functioned internally and externally. She said the neighborhood meeting had emphasized three main elements that had been incorporated into the plan. Ms. Lacey said the public had expressed that the location was integral in not only creating and enhancing the gateway into the community, but also that it would act as a central community using links and density through intensity and use of transitions to pull together the historic downtown to the north as well as Waterstone to the south.

Ms. Lacey to create that gateway they had focused on the following elements:

- implement traffic improvements
- consolidate curb cuts where possible
- serve as a catalyst for implementation of the Churton Street Corridor Plan, which included improved signage along Churton Street, improved landscaping, sidewalks, and streetlights

Ms. Lacey said to create the central destination the following elements were considered:

- the property identified in the Strategic Growth Plan as having mixed use development potential, location or central between historic downtown Hillsborough to the north and Waterstone to the south.
- efficient location of this property for the integration of water and sewer infrastructure
- provide goods and services to the area in the centralized location
- provide opportunities for public gathering spaces, recreational, open space, and greenways and trails.

Ms. Lacey said the transition elements they had focused on were:

- transition from greater to lesser density, moving from west to east
- provide a link from north to south through the transition of densities, intensities and uses
- the vehicular and pedestrian links to pull the east/west and north/south portions of Hillsborough together through the use of this master plan for the site.

Ms. Lacey said within each of the three main visions, the master plan had been designed to create significant open space, trail and greenway opportunities, from historic downtown to Waterstone. She said there was an opportunity for a park in a centralized location, to provide recreation fields, trail head and public parking opportunities. Ms. Lacey provided more detail on the recreation area and its proposed location, as well as some of the proposed amenities on that site. She then provided some detail on the pedestrian and vehicular elements, explaining how commercial uses would transition into residential and residential would transition into commercial, and how those transitions would create the streetscapes.

Earl Lewellyn, head of the Traffic Engineering Group with the John R. McAdams Company, stated they were in the process of completing the analysis and preparing the report for the traffic study. He said prior to beginning that process, they had met with NCDOT to determine the scope of the analysis and what the detailed engineering assumptions should be. Mr. Lewellyn said their analysis was based on those discussions as well as accepted standards of NCDOT and the Institute of Transportation Engineers. He said that report should be ready in the next ten days.

Mr. Lewellyn provided a quick overview of the improvements that their analysis was indicating was necessary:

- dual left turn lanes turning onto Churton Street southbound
- dual left turns at I-85, with widening under the bridge to accommodate four lanes, two headed southbound, one headed northbound, and one as a through lane
- just beyond the bridge structure, a second northbound through lane
- widen to 4 lanes along whole frontage
- northbound lane on Churton remains until Windmill, at least
- Left turn lane at US 70 Business, with the train crossing at grade
- Left turn on US 70 A

Mr. Oliver said they were proposing high intensity commercial and residential as well as medium residential. He asked if there was any parcel that was proposed to be used as multipurpose, such as neighborhood business with residential. Mr. Dye said the mixed of uses was more horizontal than vertical. He said they had considered a transition of uses between pods.

Mr. Remington stated that the Churton Street Corridor Plan called for roundabouts, and this project provided a good opportunity to begin that. He said he did not see those figured into the improvement plan. Mr. Lewellyn said they had looked at that with NCDOT, and had concluded that given the projected volumes they would not function well enough even under the 2-lane roundabout scenario.

Mr. Campanella asked about Orange Grove Road, which was one of the places the Churton Street Corridor Plan had specified for a roundabout. Mr. Lewellyn said they had not analyzed a roundabout in that area, but a roundabout would probably work there. He said they would have to consider the amount of right-of-way required.

Mr. Remington asked did the projections include the improved flow with roundabouts? Mr. Lewellyn said yes, but added that the analysis tool had a hard time documenting the intangibles with consolidated driveways and

constricting things to right-in/right out. He added that they did not have much control at Orange Grove Road, noting there was a public right-of-way back into the Collins property, and a roundabout would have to be considered in terms of the amount of right-of-way available.

Commissioner Hallman asked if they had talked with railroad officials about the grade crossing. Mr. Lewellyn said they were in the process of setting that meeting. Commissioner Hallman asked if they had seen the concept drawings of I-85 interchanges and ramp improvements to figure into their plans. Mr. Lewellyn said he should be receiving those within the next few days. Ms. Hauth offered to email them to him.

Commissioner Hallman asked how they proposed to connect Parcel E across I-85 to the rest of the development, specifically the green space. Mr. Dye said there were no direct vehicular connections, noting they were more greenway connections taking advantage of the underpass under I-85. He said that was a part of the discussion with the railroad officials, along with the crossing at the north end of the property. Commissioner Hallman said he was more concerned about the pedestrian access there.

Commissioner Gering said the Churton Street Corridor Plan promoted the reduction of curb cuts and driveways, but it was not obvious how that would be achieved on the plan. Mr. Dye said for those that they controlled on their limited frontage, they would consolidate and close off all that was possible.

Ms. Ellis said nothing had yet been said about giving the town what it really needed, for example a movie theater, a bowling alley, a grocery store, a drug store, a cafeteria, and other commercial uses. She suggested a hotel with a banquet facility should be considered. Ms. Ellis said the town needed more than walking trails, open space, and soccer fields. Mr. Dye said they were at square one, adding that such uses were on their list but it was premature to discuss them now. He said they were here tonight to look at the annexation of the property and then a rezoning to allow those types of opportunities. Ms. Ellis commented that she would like to continue the legacy of Mr. Freeland, the former owner, and provide entertainment for youth.

Ms. Faherty said they had noted the number of units per acre, and asked for a translation into total number of residential units. Mr. Dye said all together, the property could support 1300 units, but realistically only 50-75% of those would be possible when you account for internal streets, stormwater requirements, and open space requirements.

Ms. Wallace asked about the existing ball fields. Mr. Dye said that was the area where they had tried to develop the recreation space plan for Parcel D on the south side of I-85. He said they knew that the HYAA used the Collins fields on the northern part of this property, and they were still considering how that parcel could be laid out. Mr. Dye said preliminary plans showed three ball fields, a children's play area, and a trail. Ms. Wallace asked did that mean they were not considering preserving those fields as is. Mr. Dye said at this point it was an either/or.

Mr. Campanella asked about the potential for vehicle access to Parcel E. Mr. Dye said there was an entrance to an open space lot that connected to Beckett's Ridge Drive, but currently it was landlocked so they would have to look for a driveway opportunity.

Commissioner Dancy asked what the driving force was for planning of this development. Mr. Dye said they were attempting to honor the commitments to the people folks on the site. He said development would most likely be to start the residential component first, and when about 25% of those were moving forward they would begin the commercial aspect.

Commissioner Hallman said as they moved forward, the Town Board would want to work with them on how to address affordable housing issues and well as green building opportunities, both of which were important. He said they would want to bring Robert Dowling, the Executive Director of Orange Community Housing and Land Trust, into that discussion to look at options for affordability. Mr. Dye said they had given that some thought and were open to the discussion.

Mr. Campanella asked Mr. Dye to speak to the commercial mix, noting they were interested in local or national companies. Mr. Dye said they would consider property owners first, noting they were looking for firms that would bring value, thrive and survive. He said that “big boxes” did not bring a lot of value other than generating customers. Mr. Dye said 20,000 square feet was easier to fill than larger areas. He said they were looking at providing spaces for doctor’s offices and professional services integrated into such commercial areas, and creating areas for soft goods, entertainment and restaurants.

Mr. Oliver asked had any historical or archeological studies been performed. Mr. Dye said they had not done that yet, but were willing to do so.

Mr. Jones said they had used the term “appropriate redevelopment” of the existing Daniel Boone Village. He asked if they had plans to engage existing tenants and how they might exist within the new plans. Mr. Dye said they were open to that, and invited them to be a part of whatever was recreated on that site. He said they were not yet that far along in their plans.

Ms. Ellis said they needed something to replace the Big Barn, such as a banquet facility or convention center. She said when that building was taken away, there would be no place else for that type of function. Mr. Dye said that public meeting space was a concern, and the most appropriate way to provide that would be with through a hotel. He said such a use was appropriate for this site, and they would consider that.

Mayor Stevens asked how was this project unique, and how did it contribute to the character of the Town. Mr. Dye said that was hard to answer at this point, adding that would be part of the Special Use Permit process.

Commissioner Hallman stated that Waterstone had engaged local people to help with the design elements. He encouraged Mr. Dye to do the same and seek similar talents. Mr. Dye said they were open to doing that. Commissioner Hallman said there were local merchants in the audience, and noted that the planning process needed to be as transparent as possible to help them plan for the future. Mr. Dye said they were respectful of that, adding that this project would not happen overnight.

Mayor Stevens said the same was true for the residents, noting it was important that they knew and understood the timeline and what resources might be available. Mr. Dye answered they were respectful of that as well, noting they would be as open and honest as possible.

Commissioner Gering said it was imperative to know how well this project would enhance the Town and the quality of life it provided. He asked had they given any thought to how connectivity to the downtown could compliment the downtown district and make it more vital. Mr. Dye replied that was a challenge for this site given its border with the railroad, but they had paid attention to that as shown in some of the elements described tonight.

Commissioner Gering said one discussion the Town Board would like to have later on was how they might help the Town with off-site improvements, such as bikeways and walkways, to connect to the downtown district. Mr. Dye said they would be happy to discuss that. Ms. Ellis suggested that a museum of local artifacts would be appropriate for this site, stating it would draw visitors. Mr. Dye said they would consider that later on in the planning process. Ms. Wallace asked was it standard to have recreation areas on the interstate, noting it seemed unappealing to her. Mr. Dye stated they did exist, but it was not necessarily standard. He said land was captured where available for public use.

Mr. Campanella said he understood the use of that site for open space because it was a fragment of a parcel, but would hope that putting open space there did not eliminate those improvements within the larger development. Mr. Dye said other improvements were required by ordinance internal to each of those parcels.

Ms. Wallace said when they had talked with HYAA, were they amenable to the idea of moving the fields to the new site. Mr. Dye said he had not been specific about what could be done on Parcel E with HYAA, noting the importance was not to lose the facility. Ms. Wallace asked if there was any chance to keep the fields where they now were. Mr. Dye said that was open for discussion, and was an option. He said they were trying to create

alternatives so that if it was not possible to keep the fields at that location, then there were other areas where they could be located.

Commissioner Gering asked if Mr. Dye had seen the Town's traffic improvement plan that described the extension of Orange Grove Road through the area where the baseball fields were to connect to Highway 70. Mr. Dye said he had seen the concept plan. Commissioner Gering asked to what extent Mr. Dye believed they could accommodate the future extension within the site plan. Mr. Dye said those elements were open for discussion, adding that their plan focused on what was on the ground today and how to utilize it for the connection based on how their plans were laid out. He said as an alternative, it was worthwhile to look at that Highway 70 relocation and how that might work.

Mayor Stevens asked Mr. Dye if he had any questions for the boards. Mr. Dye responded that they appreciated the opportunity for the forum and discussion and the opportunity to get this kind of input.

Ms. Faherty said she was in a state of shock from realizing the enormity of the changes this plan represented. She said it was bigger and more overwhelming than she had expected it to be. Ms. Faherty said it was a lot to process. She said it would take a lot of thinking, adjusting, and planning on everyone's part to make this project something that was acceptable.

Mayor Stevens asked if there were any staff comments. Mr. Petersen said he wanted to provide an update on the fiscal and operational feasibility of providing Town services, the impact on taxes and water and sewer rate, and what the staff's plan was. He said they had recently received the projected assessed valuation and the tax value of the land and buildings, and he and the Planning Director had done an initial overview of how they would approach doing an analysis. Mr. Petersen said when Waterstone was proposed, they had done several comprehensive analyses, and there was no way to provide that same in-depth analysis in time for the March public hearing. He said the staff's approach would be to do the best to do a quick snapshot so something was ready before the public hearing. Mr. Petersen said they did not want current tax payers to subsidize this development.

Mr. Oliver asked could they do a comparison and a contrast with Waterstone. He said the least proposed density for this site was 6 units per acres, and it would be helpful to understand the impacts as compared to Waterstone. He said he also wanted to look at the water use plan. Mr. Petersen said they would prepare responses to those questions.

Mayor Stevens said even if two-thirds of those 1,300 units were built, it would use two-thirds of their remaining water capacity. He said that was a significant chunk, and a half-million square feet would be one-third of their remaining commercial capacity. Mayor Stevens said that was a significant chunk of what they knew their remaining capacity to be. Ms. Vandemark stated that these numbers seemed very close to the numbers from the water capacity study. Mr. Peterson said he was not sure, but would get that information.

Commissioner Lowen commented that the Town Board had met last night with the Orange County School Board, and one thing that was discussed at length was the growth of our school populations and looking at the possibility of land banking. With the huge number of homes being proposed, he suggested that the impact on schools be considered.

Mayor Stevens thanked the applicant and the public for attending. He reminded the public that comment cards were available in the back of the room. Mayor Stevens said the March 22 meeting would be held in downstairs in the Gordon Battle Courtroom at 7 p.m.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:17 p.m.