

PLANNING BOARD

Monday, April 09, 2007
Belmont Corner Meeting House
Belmont, New Hampshire

Members Present: Chairman P. Harris; G. Flack, W. Peterson, C. Patten, C. Long and R. Caldwell (BOS).
Staff: C. Daigle, R. Ball and E. Murphy.

The chairman opened the meeting at 6:30 p.m. Town Administrator Jeanne Beaudin, Board of Selectmen R. Cormier and J. Pike were present. Members of the Conservation Commission, K. Knowlton, S. Rolfe, N. Wederski, G. Wells-Kay, D. Naiva and M. McLetchie were present.

P. Harris explained they will begin the meeting with interviewing candidates for the openings on the Planning Board. After the interviews they will proceed with the joint meeting of the Planning Board, Conservation Commission and the Board of Selectmen. The joint meeting is to discuss with the newly elected officials the upcoming town projects and get input as to the direction they want to proceed in the upcoming year.

INTERVIEWS:

Mr. Wade Burchell and Mr. Kenneth Clough were not present for their scheduled interviews.

Mr. Jim Coviello explained that he lives on Durrell Mountain Road. He wants to be on the Board to voice his opinion on what is happening in town. The Planning Board is a perfect place to offer his services. He wanted to know what the difference is between an alternate and a full Board member. Are alternates allowed to participate in discussions? P. Harris explained that alternates sit on the Board, can participate in discussions but cannot vote unless they are appointed as a voting member in the absence of a full Board member. Mr. Coviello stated that he would like to be an alternate so that he can learn the job while still being able to voice opinions. W. Peterson stated that Mr. Coviello has built in Belmont and he wanted to know if he had any other experience. Mr. Coviello stated that he is a contractor's son and has worked his way up from the ground up. He has traveled around the world and is aware of what is happening in construction. C. Patten wanted to know what prompted him to want to join the Board. Mr. Coviello stated that there are problems with the town and if he is not involved he can't complain. He is considered an outsider and has different views which are good for the Board. C. Patten wanted to know if he has an ax to grind. Mr. Coviello stated that he doesn't. He has invested in the town and if he didn't want to stay in Belmont then he would just leave. He thinks the town is worthwhile and by participating in discussions and voicing his opinion he can help the town. C. Patten stated that they need people

willing to pitch in. Mr. Coviello stated that he won't leave town until he has his say. R. Caldwell wanted to know if he has built anywhere else in New Hampshire. Mr. Coviello stated that he had bought land in Brentwood which he cleared, did the prep work including dealing with wetlands and got it ready for a plaza. P. Harris wanted to know what direction Mr. Coviello wanted Belmont to head and what changes to the Master Plan he would like to see. Mr. Coviello stated that he is a builder and knows the building rules not the rules of government. He believes there could be changes to the Master Plan but he has to learn more before he can make a decision on it. He feels he is still a free land owner. He has questions on how the rules are to build in Belmont. The Master Plan stops development because it will not let anything develop that may affect the town in the future. This is not good business sense. P. Harris explained that planning is preparing for the future. The Board is being fair. Mr. Coviello stated he was a union steward and had to look at the whole picture and that is similar to what the Planning Board does. The things that he is fighting for that could affect the Master Plan are property owner's rights to develop their own property. They should be allowed to control what happens on their property and would be responsible if it affects other properties. The town controlling what a person can do on their property is not the way to do business. What happens within their boundaries is the property owner's responsibility and the town controls what is outside an individual's lot line. His other concern is to lower the tax rate so it is affordable. R. Caldwell stated that Mr. Coviello's goal is to loosen the rules and regulations. Mr. Coviello stated that you have to look at the limits of liability and private property and not to govern beyond the liability line. He summarized his qualifications by stating that he is an honest person and doesn't do things that shouldn't be done. He is an open person who will stand up and fight for his freedom. He is willing to get on the Board to protect that freedom.

Mr. George Condodemetra, an applicant, stated that the Board has his application and he has nothing to add. He will work with the Board and follow the rules and regulations.

JOINT MEETING WITH PLANNING BOARD, BOARD OF SELECTMEN AND CONSERVATION COMMISSION:

P. Harris stated that some additional projects discussed since the 2002 Master Plan include the Tioga River buffer, commercial and industrial rezoning, a conservation zone, prime agricultural lands, extending the village zone, creating steep slope regulations and scenic viewshed regulations.

In 2003 the projects discussed were the needs assessment and management plans for community facilities. Evaluating and amending Earth Excavation regulations. Lakes Region Planning Commission has produced a draft economic development chapter for the Master Plan. A Code Enforcement Field Inspector has been hired to address enforcement issues. The fine system has also been updated. The housing needs assessment is being addressed. Mr. Russ Thibeault is 25% of the way through completing the housing study. Recreation land/uses have been identified. A recycling center has been opened to support recycling. Aquifer protection standards have been adopted as part of the site plan regulations.

In 2004 the Town promoted "green" development with incentives to maintain unfragmented lands. They adopted an interim growth management ordinance and continued to monitor growth. A proposed growth ordinance was not adopted. They had an impact fee report done. They also worked on transportation to

identify scenic roads. They created regulations to protect wildlife and wildlife links and buffers. Developed the Park and Ride and established a Capital Reserve account to fund sidewalks and bridge maintenance. They review zoning amendments and regulations annually. They encourage cluster development and use of Best Management Practice. Each year the Board enlists input from the public to determine the projects that need addressing.

Mr. R. Cormier stated that at the Town Meeting citizen's concerns were for economic development. They felt that the best way to bring down the tax rate was to have commercial and industrial development. He explained that on Monday April 16th DRED will be giving a presentation at the Board of Selectmen's meeting on how to make the town more attractive. He stated that Belmont needs to do things to attract businesses. The Boards have to work together to make Belmont more attractive to businesses. Traveling along Rte 106 you notice a lot of property for sale and they have to find out why they are not selling. Is it too expensive, are the taxes too high or is it the lack of utilities in the area? P. Harris stated that Belmont is still young in development having zoning in place only since 1986. They are working towards economic development. Things that have to be considered are if you lower taxes it can create a big residential boom with everyone moving to Belmont. The Boards have to plan for that growth and control growth so it doesn't become a hardship.

Mr. J. Pike stated that the impression he took away from Town Meeting is that Belmont is lost. We used to have people that believed in Belmont. They saw a need and set out to accomplish it. He used the example of former Fire Chief Albert Akerstrom seeing the need for a new fire station and getting the town's people rallying around to accomplish the goal. It was through volunteering, hard work, fund raising and the support of the town that Chief Akerstrom achieved his goal. Instead of coming together for a common cause now the town is pulling apart.

Mr. Pike stated that industry comes at a price. The citizens of Belmont want the town to remain rural but they want their taxes to go down. Creating industry doesn't mean taxes will go down. The people have to realize the Boards do not say no to good ideas. When only 400 people come to Town meetings they are the ones that control the town. The Sewer Commission stops business from coming to Belmont by not extending the sewer along Rte 106. Projects don't reach the Planning Board if they cannot get sewer. Belmont has a good Planning Board and the most knowledgeable Town Planner in the Lakes Region. When plans come before the Board they are complete and ready for the Board to review. A prospective commercial development has reached a road block in Belmont because of the Sewer Commission. The project would not add to the school population or create any parking problems but because the Sewer Commission will not allow the sewer connection the project is on hold. They have invested a lot of money in the project and he doesn't feel that one man should be allowed to stop development. W. Peterson stated the Sewer Commission is an entity by itself. Members of the Planning Board have served on the Commission before and stated that is how the Commission works. Mr. Pike stated that if the town is not aware of what is happening then they cannot correct it. W. Peterson stated that there was a proposal at Town Meeting to put the Sewer Commission under the Board of Selectmen but that was defeated.

P. Harris stated that most of the people that are involved in the town have been involved for a long time.

New people need to get involved to understand how town planning is done. Mr. Ken Knowlton stated that he has gone to School Board meetings and the budget gets passed without any discussion but when it comes to Town Meeting they think they can reduce the taxes but cutting the town's budget. They are not aware that 80% of the tax rate is from the school.

Mr. Cormier stated that there are two ways to lower taxes by decreasing expenses or increasing revenue. The town portion is only part of the tax rate. The key to lowering the tax rate is to increase revenue. Belmont wants to keep its rural character but they have to let growth in. Growth is moving north and if Belmont wants to keep its rural character and not allow growth then it will come with a high tax rate. Mr. George Condodemetraky stated that with a tax rate of \$25.69 you would have to get a million dollar business in to balance the taxes. You would have to build a mall in Belmont every year to balance the taxes. Commercial development will not bring the taxes down. The problem is that the time has come to realize the tax system in the State doesn't work. Concord has to make the changes. We have a good school system and a good town. Mr. Cormier asked that if commercial development is not the way to go then what is the solution? Mr. Condodemetraky stated it is the dollar that counts and Belmont can't come up with a solution. You need to get the representatives to find another source of income. Mr. Cormier stated that Belmont doesn't have any control over Concord. Belmont has to come up with a solution that will work for them. He wants something on Rte 106 instead of nothing. Mr. Pike stated that the available workforce is an important part in determining the location of businesses. The workforce has to have an easy commute to the business from all directions.

Mr. Ray Carbone, Laconia Sun, wanted to clarify Mr. Pike's statement about Chief Akerstrom bringing the community together to build the fire station. Does Mr. Pike want the community to come together and build the other municipal facilities the same way? Mr. Pike stated that it was the community spirit that he was referring to with everyone working towards a common goal. He doesn't expect the people to build the facilities but to unite like they have done in the past. Mr. Knowlton stated that it could happen again. Mr. Pike stated that the community as a whole has accomplished a lot and he would like to see that happen again. He wants people to work with ideas not only their hands. When public hearings are held only around twelve people come out. P. Harris stated that through the Capital Improvement Program money has been appropriated for projects so they don't have to fight for each item. The CIP committee is doing a good job. Mr. Kevin Sturgeon stated that they shouldn't insult the voters that do come out. There were too many warrant articles to pass at one time. Mr. Condodemetraky stated that at School Board meetings, the moderator has to accept discussion, then items would not pass without input from the public. P. Harris stated that the people have to be informed throughout the whole process to fully understand each item.

R. Caldwell stated his biggest concern is the town being torn apart. He doesn't want that to happen again like it did twenty years ago. He wants to find a way to bring the town back together again. Mr. Carbone suggested that they use the building of the fire station as a model of how the community can come together. The community can come together and work on a town hall. The Town leaders can determine the project and get the community to contribute labor, supplies or other contributions.

Ms. Beaudin stated that the Board of Selectmen are putting together a municipal survey that will be

distributed through schools and meetings to get public input on what they feel are important issues and projects that need to be addressed.

Mr. Ron Mitchell stated that they need to look at all the positive things that Belmont has accomplished in the last twenty years. They have a good school system, good roads, restored the historic mill and made improvements to the library. Times have changed and there are fewer volunteers because of everyone's busy schedule. They have to come up with a plan to keep the community as a community. The quarterly paper helps keep the community informed and involved. Belmont's motto is "Best Town by a Dam Site" and everyone has to remember that. He works on the BRATT trail and there are many volunteers working on that project. Mr. Cormier agreed the positive accomplishments need to be recognized. Belmont does have a high tax rate that provides excellent services. The fire department is second to none, a recreation department that promotes recreational activities for all and curbside trash pick up which a lot of communities do not offer. P. Harris stated that everyone at this meeting is a volunteer. Mr. Magnus McLetchie stated that he recognizes most of the faces here and it is the same people. He thinks of the town in a positive way or he wouldn't be here if he didn't he would just move. He stated that the library is still small but that doesn't stop him from using it. The town hall needs work but you have to deal with what you have. The town promotes green space and has a trail system and a town beach. The Master Plan goal was to develop the village area. They should build the municipal facilities in village. Civic facilities can also be in the village. This would attract people to the village. Many people will travel great distances to have lunch and shop in quaint little villages. The Planning Board needs to work on fitting the master plan goals into development. It is an important job and the Planning Board needs to assert themselves.

Mr. Knowlton stated that the goal of the Conservation Commission is to preserve as much green space as possible for the future. The way they acquire land is through funds that are acquired when land comes out of current use that is a double edged sword. When the land comes out of current use it gets developed so they permanently lose more open space. He also stated that the Conservation Commission is a great Board. Its members are diverse and dedicated. They are doing the best they can with what they have to acquire important property. The Land Use staff, R Ball, is always there to help them. C. Daigle also provides them with information. The Conservation Commission and the Land Use Office are valuable to the town. The Conservation Commission hopes to continue working with the Planning Board on drafting an aquifer protection ordinance. Ms. Ginger Wells-Kay stated that the Conservation Commission news letter is getting people involved. They are just seven people but are doing a good job.

Ms. Denise Naiva stated that economic growth draws people to rural Belmont. There are Smart Growth conferences around the Lakes Region and she encourages everyone to attend them if they have the opportunity. The conference shows how to attract business while maintaining a rural character of life. She suggested changing the way we look at zoning. Why can't we have another village area to create a sense of community? Sometimes we are so rural we forget we have a community. Mr. Condodemetraky stated that when he was a selectman he suggested that they purchase land but that idea was defeated. Now they have to bite the bullet and make decisions on where to put the center of town. The town made a mistake when they voted down the land for recycling. Now the land is worth money.

Mr. Knowlton stated that the Conservation Commission has a good working relationship with the Planning Board. They have worked together on cluster developments and preserving open space. He also credited J. Marden for preserving wildlife corridors.

P. Harris stated Belmont has come a long way in short time. A civic profile is needed to learn how people feel about Belmont and what direction it should take. C. Daigle suggested having joint meetings on regular basis so they can focus on individual projects. The same people who were involved civic profile are the same ones that are still involved. Communities don't get the same response as they used to because people's lives are complex. Creating community spirit is hard in a transient community when people live extremely busy lives.

ALTERNATE POSITION:

MOTION: G. Flack moved to appoint William Rollins as a one year alternate to the Planning Board. R. Caldwell seconded. (6-0)

BOARD'S ACTION-MINUTES:

MOTION: On a motion by C. Patten, seconded by C. Long, it was voted to approve the minutes of the March 26, 2007, meeting as submitted. (6-0)

STAFF REPORT:

ELECTRONIC SIGNS:

C. Daigle stated that they have been receiving inquiries on electronic signs and electronic billboards. When the Board starts considering amendments they may want to look into regulating electronic signs. Other communities regulate how quickly the messages change as they can be a distraction to drivers. The Board discussed the fact that the billboards are grandfathered and restricted to the "C & I" zones. No new billboards are allowed. Signs can only advertise what is on site and must meet setbacks. Staff will check into the industry standards for electronic signs.

Mr. Pike stated that the new way to advertise is having a lighted billboard in the back of pick-up trucks. Advertisers are under the impression that permits are not needed for this type of advertising. If they are contacted by the town for an illegal sign they just move on. C. Daigle stated that any device that is construed as advertising needs a permit. Mr. Pike suggested that business owners be notified that a permit is needed.

ADJOURNMENT:

MOTION: On a motion by R. Caldwell, seconded by W. Peterson, it was voted unanimously to adjourn at 8:34 p.m. (6-0)

Respectfully submitted,

Elaine M Murphy
Administrative Assistant