

## PLANNING BOARD

Monday, May 9, 2005  
Belmont Corner Meeting House  
Belmont, New Hampshire

Present: Chairman P. Harris, G. Flack, W. Peterson, J. Marden and Selectmen's Representative R. Caldwell;  
Alternate C. Shibles.

Absent: Vice chairman J. Pike; Member C. Patten; Alternate C. Gilbert.

Staff: C. Daigle and R. Ball.

Also Present: Selectman Chairman B. Watterson; Member R. Cormier; Town Administrator D. McLelland, Sr. and Staff J. Beaudin.

The chairman opened the meeting at 7p.m. and appointed C. Shibles as a voting member for the evening. He thanked both the Selectmen and Mr. Thibeault for attending the meeting. He explained that the Selectmen and Planning Board have discussed the importance of better understanding the issues relating to existing and projected housing in the community.

### **Housing Study Discussion:**

The Board of Selectmen have requested that Mr. Russell Thibeault of Applied Economic Resources attend this joint meeting to discuss the preparation of a local housing needs study.

Mr. Thibeault thanked the members for being invited. He explained that AER was formed 30 years ago. The firm works for both public and private clients on approximately an equal basis. Their work for both sides of the development process allows them to better understand both perspectives.

Mr. Thibeault briefly described several housing related projects that he has completed or is currently involved in. He did the State-wide element for the NH Housing Finance Authority and has just today finished a study that will be released on Thursday on the impact housing has on school enrollment.

Mr. Thibeault has also done a lot of work on the economic impact of growth for both municipalities and developers. They are currently working on defining impacts resulting from a 500-unit development in Manchester, 150 units in Hanover and 50 units in Sanbornton. They have also done market feasibility studies. A housing analysis completed a couple of years ago for the Town of Plymouth focused on the impact of privately owned housing units occupied by University students. It was an interesting study looking at regional and local growth patterns. They are now finishing the housing and economic chapters of the Farmington Master Plan. There are some similarities between Belmont and Farmington as well as some significant differences. Farmington is on the fringe of the Portsmouth area. There the issue was the pace of growth and the impact on community services,

somewhat similar to the problem in Belmont.

Mr. Thibeault also did the original housing element for the Lakes Region in the early 1970s. He tries to give his best objective opinion. He does not feel it is the consultant's job to decide whether the Town should or should not have growth management. What he does do is to give the factual basis on which to make that decision. Part of the analysis is to define what are the issues that residents face and what is the regional statutory responsibility relating to housing. He finds in speaking with staff, that Belmont is coming off a one-year Interim Growth Management Ordinance and the pace of development is probably unprecedented. Will that continue and what are the implications?

Mr. Thibeault feels there are probably four parts to the study currently being discussed.

1. **Housing supply and demand factors.** How much does the market expect Belmont to accept over the next decade (2015 with a mid-point at 2010)? This would evaluate Belmont, both as an isolated community and also as driven from within the region. He would look at Belmont's share of the regional growth, housing and economic development.
2. **Housing affordability.** Even existing residents can be spending a disproportionate amount of their income for housing. Unlike Belmont, the issue in their Berlin study was too much housing. Berlin population dropped from 15,000 to 10,000. There was a tremendous amount of housing that no one was taking care of. In that particular case, they recommended actually demolishing 500 units. Communities can share similar problems or face unique issues.
3. **The implications of housing growth for community facilities.** If you were to grow some given number of housing units, what impact will that have on schools, fire, police, etc. Although schools can be the most heavily impacted service, there are other impacts to be considered.
4. **What are your housing and growth options?** In Farmington, Mr. Thibeault found himself in the unusual role of recommending some sort of growth management ordinance when the community planners did not feel it was necessary.

Mr. Thibeault stated that a consultant should give Belmont a menu of what options might be reasonable given the facts that are established. He noted that in 1997, he did a study for the Housing Finance Authority that said NH would have to build a lot more housing in the upcoming decade. In 2001, he did the housing needs study for the Upper Valley and it was even more clearly seen at that time. But it's important to remember that NH started the 1990s with a surplus of housing because of the market drop in the late 1980s. Although a lot of jobs were added in the 1990s, NH did not have to add a lot of housing because of that beginning surplus. Starting the next decade, NH began with a housing deficit. So it's a real balancing act. Fifteen hundred housing units have been developed or proposed in Laconia in the last 15 months. Their best year of absorption was 140 units. So there's a 10-year supply of housing coming into Laconia. What's happening is that home prices have risen to make development attractive to builders along with there being a housing shortage in most markets. What Belmont is facing is not unique. Many communities are facing it and are dealing with it in different ways.

J. Marden asked about the effect of the live birth rate on population projections. How do you separately factor in the people that are actually moving in and out? Mr. Thibeault noted that his study being released on Thursday looked at that issue in detail. The finding is that it's not that people are having fewer children, it's that

fewer people have children in school. The baby boomers being the largest demographic group no longer have children of school age. The generation following the baby boomers now has the school age children and that category is a lot smaller. They may have as many children per household, but there are fewer households. In looking at migration they do a cohort projection of school enrollment. If last year's second grade class had 100 students, and this year the third grade has 125, then 25 moved into the served community. And you can calculate that over time. Mr. Thibeault assumes the current school projection report looked at that. Gilford, for example had a very high rate of in-migration of families with children ready to start school because their school enrollment was higher than the births 5 years prior. In answer to an inquiry, Mr. Thibeault stated they do not usually look at daycares for indicators as the children also come from outside the district. It's really a calculation of births versus school enrollment and changes per year.

J. Marden noted that on the regional aspect Belmont shares schools with Canterbury. He asked if Mr. Thibeault would look at some of their numbers from Merrimack County. Mr. Thibeault noted he would first look at the existing school projection figures, but would certainly look at the Region and more closely at Canterbury because of the close school relationship. In their Hanover work, for instance, they found they have a very complicated school enrollment situation.

R. Caldwell asked about situations affecting migration. Does the theory of, "if you build it - they will come" prove true? Mr. Thibeault said there is some of that, that's true. The perceived quality of education in a community is an extremely important factor for young families. The impact is that you are probably less likely to get affluent households with a poor education system. The school facilities are second to the actual perception. It's not that you won't grow if you have substandard schools, it's a difference in the value of the homes you will get. The type of residential growth will be less likely to pay for itself. Housing is typically 80-85% of a community's tax base so the quality of your housing stock is more important than the commercial and industrial base as to whether or not you're going to be able to raise enough money to support your community needs. Even if you double your commercial/industrial tax base that would still only lower your residential tax hit by about 10%. When you're talking about residential development, it's not just quantity - it's quality. It is important to save a portion of the community for higher valued housing to offset lower value housing. It also balances out societal issues. Housing needs to be balanced across the whole spectrum of values.

P. Harris asked if Mr. Thibeault has ways to evaluate the percentage value of housing and non-residential development? Mr. Thibeault answered yes, it relates to Belmont's share of the region. He would use the Laconia Labor Market as the region. He would then look at Belmont's share of population, housing (single, multi, manufactured) and jobs. Jobs is the measure of the whole non-residential part of the community. We can also look at the non-residential tax base as a percent. Those numbers are readily available.

Mr. Cormier said he feels we are in essence becoming the bedroom community for Laconia, Tilton, Gilford, etc. That's one thing he has concerns about. Mr. Thibeault said it's really important to keep the tax base balanced. There has to be a revenue base to support the costs of the community. In a community like Gilford they have the lake front property to draw from.

C. Daigle noted that a recent LRPC report indicates that Belmont's commercial and industrial tax base as a percentage of gross valuation far exceeds the County average. The fact that Belmont is also seeing some higher

value homes being built in the community is also a necessary balance to the amount of more moderately priced housing that exists.

J. Marden asked how much open space land would factor into this review. Mr. Thibeault stated that's more a function of the Master Plan. It might be that the results of this study would encourage the Town to revisit their zoning. Although some communities are essentially at buildout, it does not appear that Belmont would have a buildout problem over the decade being projected. A build-out analysis could also be done, but the housing study is more important than the buildout analysis.

Mr. Thibeault noted that the component for funding community services would get into the costs per student and look at the tax base to find ways to improve the revenue base that residential can provide to the town without taxing existing residents hard.

P. Harris asked about implementation. Mr. Thibeault noted that if it is determined that Belmont does have a problem, the tools can include the Zoning Ordinance, Subdivision Regulations and Growth Management to influence the amount and quality of development. You might recommend larger lot zoning where there is prime land. It can be a somewhat painful process, too. Zoning changes can include lot specifications, clustering, etc. He would lay out different options that are available to better balance the quality and pace of development. But it's bigger than that also. It's how you spend your money in relation to the level of services. A good example is the quality of schools. A lot of the housing market is now driven by retirees and the baby-boomers. They're getting out of being sensitive about schools and are more interested in house layout and taxes.

W. Peterson noted prior discussions about Belmont having a lot of existing lower to mid-income housing. Would this study help Belmont determine its fair share and indicate, for instance if we need to build better housing and that we have sufficient low to moderate housing. Mr. Thibeault indicated the results of the evaluation would be clear. He noted that in Farmington, for instance, they ended up in determining that they definitely did not have a fair share problem.

The members asked about the cost of the study. Mr. Thibeault suggested that if the Town were interested in proceeding that he work with staff to define the project scope and then prepare a proposal including projected cost. He would be responsive to what he's heard tonight. W. Peterson asked if the information for fair share for the other communities used for comparison would also be included. Mr. Thibeault stated it would be because the demand is driven by the region's economy.

P. Harris asked about a time frame. Mr. Thibeault said that such studies take from 6 months to a year. They have to be done in sequence. Although the Town would ideally like answers to questions for the upcoming budget/zoning cycle, those answers will most probably be the result of the evaluative portion of the project which will be at the end. You've got to get the comparison, the history information first.

B. Watterson asked if Mr. Thibeault might be talking in the range of \$10K or \$50K since the Selectmen had committed to funding the project. Mr. Thibeault noted that the Plymouth housing study did not have as much detail, but did have a more work on the impact of University student housing. That study was between \$25K and \$35K, which seems to be a range example for this type of study. Mr. Thibeault noted he would be better able to estimate

the amount of additional information he would need from the Town once he reviewed the information already provided to him and determined the scope of the project.

The Planning Board and Selectmen thanked Mr. Thibeault for attending. They discussed the need to proceed with the project. P. Harris asked if the Selectmen were comfortable with the provider and the project scope discussed. B. Watterson noted he felt the discussion was very comprehensive and suggested the Planning Board motion the project forward.

**MOTION:** On a motion by G. Flack, seconded by W. Peterson, it was voted unanimously that staff work with Mr. Thibeault to develop the scope of work and that a proposal be submitted by Mr. Thibeault for the project. (6-0)

Susan Condodemetraky asked if the Town's interest in this project was a reaction to the defeat of the proposed zoning ordinances and the amount of development being proposed coming out of the one-year moratorium. She noted there was lousy weather on voting day and the vote may not be representative of the community. P. Harris said the study would provide guidance to the Town on the actual needs of the community and what options are available. The Board has the same concerns it had originally, but perhaps there are other options. It will address a lot of housing issues. As to the vote question, there are arguments on both sides of what it meant. But that's history. The point is to get better and more information to guide where the Board goes from here. The housing study is a big part of the master plan. It was already identified on the "to-do" list that was a result of the 2002 Master Plan update. This is one project that would have been done regardless of the 2005 ballot vote.

### **BOARD'S ACTION-MINUTES:**

J. Marden asked that the first sentence under item D, Staff Report be changed to, "J. Marden asked that the Heritage Commission be included in the review of applications".

**MOTION:** On a motion by G. Flack, seconded by J. Marden, it was voted to approve the minutes of the April 25, 2005, meeting as amended. (6-0)

The members discussed sending Department Head packets to the Heritage Commission, whether it was intended to be every Planning Board and ZBA application or only those impacting historic and/or cultural sites. J. Marden stated his recommendation had not been for every application. W. Peterson noted that once the Commission had completed the inventory of sites that should be done it would be easier to determine which applications might be included. C. Daigle noted she had already offered Mr. Rhodes the opportunity to participate in the Department Head review process. She will at least send him meeting agendas.

### **STAFF REPORT:**

#### **A. Townsend – In-law Document – 222/27:**

The Board signed the Michael Townsend in-law covenant document to be recorded in the Registry.

**B. Astoria/Patel Dental – Landscaping:**

J. Marden reported that snowmobilers are using the property to access the Mobil on the Run across Laconia Road. The trail is not a trail sanctioned by the club. It may be primarily local riders. It's a problem for the landowner related to safety and site damage. In addition, the owner would like to eliminate the island/tree in the middle of the parking lot and also trees along the front of the building.

The Board determined that the snowmobilers using the property could be relocated if the owner chose to do so, but that it was not a requirement of the Board. The owner can prohibit the use if they wish. In addition they approved the elimination of the island/tree and agreed to the removal of two trees at the front of the building if one additional sugar maple was planted at the Bishop Rd/Laconia Road intersection corner of the lot. Staff could work with the owner to make other necessary adjustments in the plan.

**C. DES Public Hearing – Bestway:**

The NH DES will hold a public informational meeting at 6pm on June 7<sup>th</sup> for the purpose of taking testimony on the proposed BBI/Bestway C&D Transfer and recycling center on Industrial Drive that the Planning Board has previously approved. C. Daigle asked that members attend if possible.

**D. Glenn Martel – Frontage Parking, 125/55:**

C. Daigle informed the Board that Mr. Martel will be extending his berm out into the NH DOT ROW at the request of NH DOT to prohibit street side parking related to the ballfield located across the street. Such parking is very dangerous and is not legal. Vehicles are also blocking Mr. Martel's driveway.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

**MOTION:** On a motion by W. Peterson, seconded by R. Caldwell, it was voted unanimously to adjourn at 8:30p.m. (6-0)

Respectfully submitted,

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Candace L. Daigle, Town Planner