

**Borough of Watchung  
Planning Board Special Meeting  
October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2010  
Minutes**

Salute to the flag.

Chairman Speeney called the meeting to order at 7:04pm. Salute to the flag.

The Chair called for a roll call. Present at the call of the roll were:

Speeney (X) Boyd (A) Havas (X) Haveson (X) Addario (X) Pennett (A)

Schaefer (X) Beck-Clemens (X) Panzarella (A) Ellis (X) Pote (A) Mayor Ellis arrived at 7:20pm

Also present was Attorney Ben Wetzel standing in for Board attorney Frank Linnus and board Engineer Tom Herits.

Chairman Speeney indicated there was a quorum to conduct business and indicated that The Chair stated that this meeting was being held in compliance with N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 et. seq. of the open public meetings law and proper notification of this meeting has been made. Chairman Speeney said that the primary agenda item was a work session on the reexamination of the Master Plan, and turned the meeting over to Tracee Schaefer who was chairing the subcommittee for the Master Plan Review.

Mrs. Schaefer introduced Mark Healey PP/AICP who was a professional planner.

Mr. Healey stated his address was 14 Coleman Avenue, Red Bank, NJ 07701.

Mr. Healey explained that he wrote a memo dated October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2010 based on a meeting of the Master Plan subcommittee with Chairman Speeney and Mrs. Schaefer. Mr. Healey said that the re-exam process is straightforward. He said that they review what was in the last re-exam report, evaluate what changes have been accomplished locally, evaluate what changes in policies, laws, both locally and state have happened, and make recommendations based on those changes. Mr. Healey went over his report point by point.

Accomplishments made since the 2005 re-exam report were as follows:

The major accomplishment was the adoption of the Land Development Ordinance

- The need for updated zoning ordinance
- Quarry redevelopment zoning
- Rezoning of the BJ's shopping center to the HD district

- Elimination of research laboratory as permitted use in the HD district
- Modification of permitted uses in the "B-A" neighborhood business district
- Reducing, eliminating or modifying certain B-A districts within the Borough (i.e., along Bonnie Burn Road, Mountain Blvd., and Somerset Street/village circle).
- Revised shopping center regulations
- Creation of cemetery zone on the north side of I-78
- Steep slope regulations. Retained in ordinance via Ordinance 09/01
- Incorporation of Borough's telecommunications regulations into the zoning ordinance.
- Revised house of worship requirements.
- Revised requirements for home professional offices including a square footage maximum.
- The Rescue Squad facility has been expanded.
- Review of School District's Long-Range Educational Facility needs.
- This following critical components of the Borough's "Village Center/Somerset Street" and "Spratford Park" efforts have been accomplished:
  - Major sidewalk improvements have been installed along the Stony Brook side of the corridor providing pedestrian access to/from and within the "triangle" business and residential area to the village center and Spratford Park.
  - A sidewalk has been constructed along Stirling Road, up to the entrance to the Valley view school.
  - A new sidewalk has been provided along Valley Road in the area of the village circle and Best Lake connecting this area to an existing sidewalk along Valley Road.
  - Somerset Street has been converted into a boulevard with an attractive landscaped median running it's length and decorative lights have been installed along the length of Somerset Street.
  - A gateway sign has been placed in Spratford Park signifying the entrance into the heart of the Borough.
  - Traffic safety improvements have been made at the Hillcrest Road/Valley Road intersection.
  - An overlook has been provided along Stony Brook.
- The Ness property has been acquired by the Borough for open space and community use.

Mr. Healey next went on to land use development issues. He explained that the board had come up with some ways to eliminate "McMansions" from springing up, namely a cap on floor area, floor area ratio, and building coverage. Mr. Haveson asked what the pitfalls of floor area, floor area ratio and building

coverage are. Mr. Healy said that you must have a sense of what your floor area coverage is in your town, and how it will affect different neighborhoods. Mr. Haveson asked why the board couldn't just pick a floor area coverage limit. Mr. Healey said that you must be very careful with this, since you don't want to create non-conforming homes all over town. If that were the case, if homeowners wanted to do almost anything, they would find themselves in front of the Board of Adjustment. Chairman Speeney said that they do not want to create a large non-conformity base in the Borough. Mr. Panzarella said that if someone buys two lots and combines them, they could still have a huge home that conforms. He asked if you could look at an average square footage of a neighborhood, and put a cap on the percentage of square footage. Mr. Healey said yes, but that you would have to be very careful. The Chair said that Mr. Healey could look around the town where this was an issue based on different zones. Mrs. Schaefer asked if you could break down floor area coverage percentages by zone. Mr. Healey said that you could probably do that, it is complicated. Mr. Healey reminded the board that when working on the LDO, building height was also talked about a lot.

Dan Cronheim, Chairman of the Board of Adjustment of the Borough came to the microphone. He brought up the example of the Ratay property, how large the home is, but because it is set back so far, you don't even know that it's there. He discussed setbacks, and said that if you were to change the front yard setbacks, the "McMansions" would not be as near the street, and therefore would not be as imposing. He also explained that the further you set a house back from the street, the more driveway you need, and said that because of this, increasing the impervious coverage percentage would help keep the houses back from the street. Mr. Cronheim discussed impervious surface limits in the RML districts. He said that if someone needs to expand, they need to come to the board of adjustment. Mr. Healey discussed lighting standards. Mr. Cronheim said that lighting is an enforcement issue, and Mayor Ellis agreed that he would like to see that issue left alone. Mr. Healey said that they could put in some standards, and that this was a very easy thing to do. Mr. Cronheim said that sports courts are becoming popular, and the lighting associated with that could be very annoying.

Mr. Healey discussed the consolidation of commercial districts in the highway zone. Mrs. Schaefer asked what the benefit of pursuing this would be. Mr. Healey said that he did not see a benefit.

Mixed use development in the Route 22 corridor was discussed and Mr. Healey stated that the 2005 reexamination report indicated that the Borough should investigate redevelopment opportunities for mixed use, pedestrian-oriented design in the Route 22 corridor and that the Borough should continue to

investigate such opportunities, particularly if such redevelopment could help meet the Borough's COAH obligation.

Mr. Healey discussed a request that the Borough has received to expand the RML II zone located along Bonnie Burn Road. Under this proposal, the RML II would be expanded but the number of potential units compared to what was previously anticipated would be reduced due to the presence of wetlands.

Mr. Healey went on to discuss the Village Center/Somerset Street/Spratford Park area and said that the following are still to be accomplished:

- The acquisition of the gas station to complete Spratford Park. The acquisition of the existing gas station could be converted to park use, so that the entire strip would be used for park.
- Village design standards. The 1994 Master Plan update suggested the need for design standards in the village center by suggesting zoning controls that address "architectural themes which reflect the scale, details, ornamentation and overall appearance of traditional American villages and which are compatible with the existing architecturally significant buildings in this portion of the Borough." The 2005 reexamination report reiterated this recommendation.
- Sidewalk around Best Lake
- Sidewalk along the north side of Mountain Blvd. From Brookdale Road to the Ness property.

Mr. Cronheim said that the County is making provisions for the sidewalks on Mountain Blvd to be on the south side of the road. He explained that there are no easements on the north side. The Mayor said that the County told the Borough that if they wanted sidewalks on the north side, we must pay for them.

Mr. Healey said that the reexamination report would generally describe the Borough's proposed Fair Share Plan and generally address the current status of the COAH situation. (i.e., recent decisions and S-1 and other legislation)

Mr. Healey discussed community facilities. The board adopted a new open space and recreation plan in July 2006 and an element of the Master Plan. The Borough council endorsed the plan a month later. Mr. Healey said that while certain recommendations have been accomplished like the acquisition of the Ness property and the sidewalks along Somerset Street, most of the recommendations remain to be accomplished. He asked if the board thought that anything in particular should be given priority such as the revision of the quarry ordinance. The board discussed the quarry and also East Drive. Some of the points were:

- Stony Brook River Corridor Conservation Area- the remaining properties not in public ownership are to be acquired so the entire area can be developed as a park.
- Vacant parcels identified for potential conservation-the plan recommends that vacant parcels identified in the plan be evaluated for the likelihood of future development, adjacency to existing open space and then prioritized for acquisition by the Borough or for protection by conservation easement.
- Vacant parcels identified for potential pocket parks- the plan recommends that vacant parcels identified in the plan be evaluated for conversion into small pocket parks for passive enjoyment, with priority given to parcels in neighborhoods that have the least amount of available open space.
- Connell property- the plan recommends acquisition of Connell properties along Valley Road opposite the quarry area for creation of a linear park system to be developed in conjunction with any open space areas created following redevelopment of the quarry.
- Brook Hill Swim and Tennis Club- the plan suggests that the Borough pursue public acquisition of the facility for the use and development of active recreation and the adjacent isolated open space lots and the Borough may also want to consider a purchase of the property and then a lease back of the facility to the current owners for the operation of the facility for a set period of time, after which, ownership and operation would revert back to the Borough.
- Mt. Saint Mary's-the plan recommends that the Borough consider pursuing acquisition of a conservation easement on the remaining, undeveloped portions of the property. Mr. Healey said that this would appear to be in conflict, at least in part, with the proposed overlay zone in the Fair Share Plan.
- Trails- the plan recommends investigation of trails in the following locations/areas: recreating portions of Old Somerset Trail that ran along the current course of Old Somerset Road; along utility right of ways; Camp Endeavor and the Bayberry School; Anderson Road Open Space area; Best Lake; Phillips Field; Connell properties; and upper quarry area.
- Entry Boulevards- consistent with a recommendation in the previous open space plan of 2000, the plan recommends greater emphasis on open space protection and community character along gateway roads like Somerset Street from North Plainfield, Mountain Blvd. from Warren, Hillcrest Road from Warren, Valley Road beyond the quarry. The plan indicates that some of these areas may offer opportunities for acquisition for historic preservation, shade tree plantings or revised zoning controls.
- Quarry Redevelopment- the plan recommends revision of the zoning ordinance to ensure significant open space areas, especially the areas at the top of the quarry that lie at current road grade, are dedicated for open space and

recreation.

- East Drive- the plan envisions dedication of the property to permanent protected open space for critical areas protection. This recommendation is in conflict with the Fair Share Plan.
- Phillips Field- The plan identifies the following issues "raised in previous open space plans and Master Plans that may be addressed at Camp Endeavor": additional baseball and softball fields; providing a new all purpose field for lacrosse, field hockey and soccer; building of an all-purpose recreation center; and creating a skate park.

Mr. Healey discussed the New Library/Community Center. He said that in the 2005 reexamination report it was indicated that there was a desire to build a new library on the current site or another site. The Library Advisory Board indicated that a new library could also serve as a community center. This could serve the seniors, the Bicentennial Room, and accommodate non-profit groups in town looking for a place to meet. Further, the Arts Center has also expressed interest in being part of a new community center. This is still being explored.

Mr. Healey discussed the disposition of paper streets. He said that that the 2005 reexamination report reiterated a "general policy" expressed the 1999 report which indicated that paper streets only be used for utility placement and not improved as public roads. Further, it reiterated the recommendation in the 1999 report that the Borough Engineer prepare an inventory of paper streets in the Borough and make recommendations concerning their disposition.

Traffic circulation was discussed. Regarding regional traffic, the Borough is located between two major regional thoroughfares- Interstate I-78 and US Highway 22. As such, the Borough experiences a significant amount of regional cut-through traffic. Both the 1994 Master Plan Update and the 1999 reexamination report identified regional traffic through the Borough as a significant issue. The 1999 reexamination report addressed this issue as well, and specifically indicated that " traffic congestion needs to be relieved in the areas of New Providence and Bonnie Burn Roads as well as Hillcrest Road and Somerset Street" and that the Borough "should be active in the seeking assistance from the County and/or State to find solutions to these traffic issues". The 2005 reexamination report noted that the Borough continued to monitor factors such as capital improvements that may affect regional traffic through the Borough. It cited as an example, concern that the planned I-78 Interchange at Diamond Hill Road would increase traffic along New Providence Road, resulting in a bottleneck condition implying the need for improvements to New

Providence Road. It is assumed that regional traffic should continue to be identified as a significant issue.

As far as pedestrian improvements in addition to the village center and along Somerset Street, the 2005 report recommended that the Borough seek pedestrian improvements in other areas of the Borough that currently experience pedestrian activity or that may experience such activity in the future such as: areas connecting community facilities, parks and/or schools; and, along Route 22 particularly between Crystal Ridge apartment development and North Drive along the north side of the highway.

Chairman Speeney said that he would also like to see an improvement at the corner of Washington Rock Road and Mountain Boulevard, and also and the corner of Anderson Road and Mountain Boulevard. He said that he would like to see turning lanes and also to have the shoulders of the road fixed.

Regarding Infrastructure Improvements, the Water and Sewer lines in the Village Center were discussed. The Planning and implementation agenda associated with the Village Center designation indicated that the sewer lines in the village center were deteriorating because of age and need to be replaced or upgraded for environmental reasons. It is also indicated the possible need for analysis of water lines in the village center. The 2005 reexamination report recommended that such improvements continue to be pursued, as necessary. Mr. Healey will provide an update to this in his draft.

Regarding the extension of sewer into the eastern section of the Borough, the 2005 reexamination report indicated that extension of sewer into the eastern section of the Borough was identified as a need in the Borough's Cross Acceptance Report and that the Borough was currently pursuing that at the time. Mr. Healey will provide an update to this in his draft.

Regional and State Planning was discussed. The reexamination report will describe the County's ongoing Wastewater Management Plan effort and will evaluate proposed changes in Watchung and their effect, if any, on the Borough. On October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2002, the State Planning Commission designated the "Watchung Village Center". The area designated was smaller than originally requested, having excluded most of Somerset Street corridor, the "triangle" area and additional areas on the periphery of the village center. The 2005 reexamination report recommended that the Borough revisit this issue when preparing its petition for Initial plan endorsement with the Office of Smart Growth. The Borough initiated the process of Initial Plan Endorsement but did not pursue it as it was deemed to be not worth the effort. Further, the future of the Office of Smart Growth and the Plan Endorsement process is uncertain at

this time.

Regarding Cross Acceptance, on April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2004 the New Jersey State Planning Commission approved the release of the Preliminary State Plan Policy Map. The Borough did not object to the designation of planning areas within the Borough. However, the Borough did question why the Weldon Quarry area was designated as a Critical Environmental Site (CES). As a result, the Weldon Quarry area is no longer designated with the CES on the current draft of the State Plan Policy Map. However, the State Planning process is uncertain at this time.

Mr. Healey explained the next step is to have a public meeting to allow the public an opportunity to express any concerns, opinions or comments they may have regarding planning and development issues in the Borough. Mr. Healey said he would prepare a draft reexamination report after the public meeting addressing the matters raised at this meeting and the next. That report will then be submitted to the Planning Board for their review. Mr. Healey said he will then meet with the Planning Board to review the reexamination report draft. The Chair opened up discussion from the public. Mrs. Jane Cole was in the audience, along with Mr. Dan Cronheim. Mr. Healey said that hopefully the Zoning Board's annual report would be submitted to the Planning Board by January. Mr. Cronheim said he would address that. Hearing no more discussion from the public, the Chair closed the public portion of the meeting. It was decided that the next special meeting of the planning board for the public would be held on November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2010 in Council Chambers at 7:00pm

Respectfully Submitted,

Carolyn Taylor  
Planning Board Clerk