

CHATHAM BOROUGH PLANNING BOARD

June 17, 2020

7:30 p.m.

Chairman Susan W. Favate called the Chatham Borough Planning Board Regular Meeting of June 17, 2020 to order, by Zoom, at 7:30 p.m. in the Council Chambers, Chatham Municipal Building. Chrnm. Favate announced that all legal notices have been posted for this meeting. This was a virtual meeting. Board members were present by way of Zoom.

Name	Present	Absent
Mayor Thaddeus Kobylarz	X	
Council Member Irene Treloar	X	
Steve Williams	X	
H.H. Montague	X	
Matthew Wagner		X
Chrnm. Susan Favate	X	
Curt Dawson	X	
Joseph Mikulewicz	X	
Gregory Xikes	X	
William Heap	X	
Torri Van Wie		X
Vincent K. Loughlin, Esq.	X	

Also present:

Vincent DeNave, P.E. Chatham Borough Engineer & Zoning Officer

Public Comment

There were none

Resolution #PB 2020-01

Mr. Williams made a motion to approve the minutes of the March 4, 2020 Planning Board meeting as submitted. Mr. Montague seconded the motion. A voice vote was taken. Mr. Mikulewicz abstained from voting because he was absent at that meeting. The minutes of the March 4, 2020 meeting were approved as submitted.

Discussion Item

Potential Master Plan Re-Examination

Chrnm. Favate invited Mr. DeNave to give background information on this topic.

Mr. DeNave noted that the Borough Council has designated part of River Road, which is the M-3 District, as a redevelopment area. Even though the redevelopment has slowed down because of the pandemic, it is getting closer to completion. There is a proposal for 259 residential apartments at the intersection of Watchung Ave. and River Road. Eventually, this proposal will come before the Planning Board.

Mr. DeNave reported that one of the matters under discussion by the Borough Council, is whether or not the rest of River Road, including the M-1 and M-3 Districts, could handle much more residential, than what is allowed by the Borough ordinance.

Mr. DeNave recalled that when the Reexamination of the Master Plan was discussed in 2016, that in order to stimulate the market, encouragement was given to purchase some of these properties and have them redevelop on their own.

Mr. DeNave noted that the zoning was then opened up to allow many, many uses in that area of town, particular the M-1 and M-3 District. He felt it was time for the Board to re-examine the M District, and see whether or not, what uses are in there are still appropriate, assuming that 259 residential units will be established at that corner (Watchung Ave. & River Rd.). Would the Board still want to permit what is allowed in the M-District, zoning-wise, to continue to be allowed?

Mr. DeNave clarified that he is not arguing for or against whether more or less housing should be established in this location. He has heard comments from the public that maybe the number of units should not go beyond the 259.

Mr. DeNave asked Board members if they were satisfied with what the Master Plan dictates for this situation, or should it be tweaked? He suggested all the uses in the M-District be looked at again. Mr. DeNave suggested consideration be given to uses that could be complimentary to the residential units in that district. .

Chrmn. Favate agreed with Mr. DeNave's suggestion that the uses for the M District would be incentivizing. However, would she asked if this revision to the Master Plan would jeopardize the Gateway Plan. Chrmn. Favate reminded the Board that the Gateway Plan included addressing the Borough's Affordable Housing unmet needs.

Mr. DeNave answered that there are certain lots that are designated for these unmet Affordable Housing needs.

Chrmn. Favate stated that she would like to avoid changing the Affordable Housing plan.

Mr. Montague asked about the status of the First Student bus company on River Road.

Mr. DeNave answered that the school bus company was supposed to vacate the property on August 1st; however, they will be submitting an application soon, seeking to extent their departure time for another year. The school bus company will be appearing soon before the Zoning Bd. of Adjustment regarding this request.

Mr. DeNave commented that the M District is a very unique zone. There is still a desire to keep industry and trades in that area; however, some updating may be needed. Perhaps a second downtown will be created in that section of the town. Talks have been held about establishing a second train station in that district.

Mayor Kobylarz discussed the Innovation Designation District Program. This legislation was sponsored by State Senator Jim Kennedy, and was recently passed into law. Senator Kennedy visited River Road and Commerce Street with Mayor Kobylarz and Mr. Williams recently. Senator Kennedy felt River Road would be a good candidate for such a designation. Mayor Kobylarz felt that this M District could still remain a mixed use. Senator Kennedy had informed Mayor Kobylarz that there are funding grant programs available that could provide incentive for some young companies to move in. Mayor Kobylarz felt there was plenty of room in the M District for a good mix of uses.

Chrmn. Favate believed that Commerce Street was both a very useful and interesting section of town. The Commerce Street businesses are very much needed by residents.

Mayor Kobylarz pointed out that the Designation District legislation does not force any businesses out. He felt that Commerce Street would be ripe for a mixed-use.

To Mr. DeNave, Chrmn. Favate suggested that the public rights-of-way on Watchung Avenue should be looked at. A recent application before the Board pointed out the unusual parking arrangements on the corner of Watchung Ave. and Commerce Street.

Mayor Kobylarz commented that he would like to see more life breathed into the M District.

Mr. Mikulewicz brought up the possibility of a hotel/conference center some day in the M District.

Summing up, Chrmn. Favate asked the Board if they had any negative thoughts about undertaking this study on the M District.

Mayor Kobylarz and Mr. Montague discussed the business and recreational potential of the Riverside property in the M District.

Mr. DeNave stated that Kendra Lelie will be hired for this Reexamination project. Ms. Lelie has already submitted a proposal. He suggested Chrmn. Favate also form a subcommittee to also work on this study. Besides Ms. Lelie, the professional planner, Mr. DeNave suggested some commercial real estate agent could be consulted about how the market is turning these days.

Chrmn. Favate asked if the Board should officially recommend to the governing body to undertake this particular study.

Board Attorney Loughlin answered that the Master Plan is an item specifically committed to the Planning Board only, not the Mayor and Borough Council. It is up to the Planning Board, in this case, to initiate action, form a subcommittee and hire Ms. Lelie for her planning services.

Chrmn. Favate asked for volunteers from the Board to serve on the subcommittee to re-examine this portion of the Master Plan. Attorney Loughlin pointed out that there is a limit of three Board members to serve on this subcommittee. The following volunteered: Mayor Kobylarz, Mr. Xikes, and Council Member Treloar.

Mr. DeNave advised Board members that soon the Board will be considering a fee ordinance in the LDO. Also, later in the year, an application for River Rd. will be heard by the Planning Board.

Attorney Loughlin advised that the Board take a vote on establishing this subcommittee and the study it will undertake. He pointed out that Mr. DeNave will serve as ex officio on this subcommittee:

Mr. Williams made a motion that the Board establish a subcommittee to undertake the Reexamination tasks as stated by Chrnm. Favate and Mr. DeNave. The motion was seconded by Mr. Mikulewicz. A voice vote was taken. All Board members present voted aye.

Chrnm. Favate advised the Board that they will be revisiting a house scale issue in the near future, as well as the fee ordinance change. She asked Mr. Williams and Mr. DeNave when Board meetings with a public presence will come back.

Mr. Williams answered that a word of caution right now when public meetings can be held in Borough Hall again. Mayor Kobylarz answered hopefully by late summer.

Board members discussed the outdoor dining-out situation of Borough restaurants. At this point, it is slowly taking off. Mayor Kobylarz said some thought has been given to blocking off sections of South Passaic Ave. and Center Street for outdoor dining.

Related to this situation, Mayor Kobylarz reported that the Economic Development Advisory Committee has been looking into ways to bolster downtown businesses during this present economic crisis. They have been meeting on a weekly basis and forming subcommittees.

Mr. DeNave informed the Board that the Little Schoolhouse may have an application before the Planning Board soon. They are proposing a change of location on Main Street.

Mr. Heap suggested the Board hold an outdoor meeting in the future, instead of a Zoom meeting.

The Planning Board decided to tentatively cancel their July 1, 2020 meeting.

Respectfully submitted:

Elizabeth Holler
Recording Secretary