

Board of Selectmen – May 9, 2011

Present: Babson, Tsagaris, Searle, Gibbs, Dugan

Also present: Larsen, Ketchen (Connolly and Robinson were absent)

Meeting called to order at 7:00 pm.

Warrants approved: Number 2011-47 in the amount of \$5,086,608.09

1. Citizen Speak

None.

2. Central Street Planning Study

Don McCauley, Jean Conroy, Neil Glick, Meghan Jop and Michael Zehner joined the Selectmen and Mr. McCauley summarized the Planning Board's interest in collaborating with the Selectmen in a study of the Central Street commercial area. The current number of vacancies and retail shop turnover, particularly on Central Street, has caused the Board to conclude that further investigation is warranted. Specifically, the Board sees a need to assess what steps might be needed to ensure the continued vitality of the Town's commercial districts.

The two Boards briefly discussed an approach whereby a group of interested parties, involving members of both Boards and representatives of the merchants would meet to brainstorm regarding the scope and focus of a study.

Mr. Larsen noted the Selectmen are anticipating a more substantive assessment of the merits of a dual tax rate later this summer, and suggested it would be in everybody's best interest to understand the business issues facing our commercial property owners as we prepare for that discussion.

Ms. Babson invited public input, and the comments of each speaker are summarized below.

Brad Perry, Treasurer of Holman Family Partnership, owner of the block of properties referred to as Church Square

- Despite future economic recovery, we are likely to continue to face economic pressure.
- Tenants (not the landlords) pay the taxes, which have been the biggest expense growth item.
- Over the past 7 years, property taxes have gone up 20%/year.
- Implementation of a dual tax would be a "super killer" for tenants who are struggling to stay afloat.
- Any committee to study these issues should include someone from the Board of Assessors.
- Parking remains a problem. Five parking studies over the years have dead-ended. Need more parking near the stores.
- Snow removal has deteriorated, particularly this winter. Tenants lost business as a result.
- Individuality of proprietors creates the character of Wellesley downtown and makes it a fun place to shop.
- Supports a broad-based study with professional support.

Stan Shotkus, owner of Potpourri Designs (a Holman tenant).

- Commended Mr. Perry for his stewardship of the Holman block.
- Company has 7 locations (5 in MA, 2 in CT)
- Some rents on Central Street may be unrealistic

- Dual tax a death knell for commercial tenants
- Look at Lexington and Concord to see the difference between single and dual tax rate
- Enforcement of parking is too aggressive.
- Need a plan for more parking, vs. just another study

Stuart Swan

- Commercial property owners pay their full share of taxes, but don't ask much of the Town.
- Believes the DPW did a great job of snow plowing this past winter
- Past parking committees have been a waste of time
- Parking can be developed along the south side of the railroad tracks. The property was originally taken by eminent domain.
- Additional parking potentially available at the MLP substation
- Closure of Filene's (small but profitable) was a watershed moment for Central Street.
- A dual tax rate would be the death knell for commercial tenants.
- Linden Square was a bonafide improvement for the Town, but has put pressure on Central Street property owners.
- Wellesley remains very strong in terms of retail opportunity.

3. Common Victualler License Application – Justine's, 978 Worcester Street

Ms. Babson reopened this hearing and immediately continued it to May 23rd.

2. Central Street Planning Study, public input continued

Sturdy Waterman, Page-Waterman Gallery, 26 Church Street (also a Holman tenant)

- All retail businesses have been impacted by the growth in web-based retail.
- Need to make the Town as retail-friendly as possible, e.g. remove snow from streets to facilitate shopping.

Dennis DiSchino, owner of property on Central Street

- Make all day parking for tenants at Tailby cheaper, e.g. one dollar a day.
- Reduce seat minimum for liquor license to 50. Would enable more chef-owned restaurants.
- Tax rate itself is meaningless; have to look at assessed values. Wellesley has raised the values, which has driven up the revenue.
- Town effectively has a significant asset in terms of tax-generating businesses on Central Street, and yet the Town does not invest much, e.g., in terms of adequate snow removal.

Rob Skolnick, E.A. Davis

- Important to look at other towns, e.g., Greenwich CT and Georgetown.
- The downtown area is a fashion district, as opposed to service districts in other parts of Wellesley. A study of commercial areas across the town would be a larger study.
- E.A. Davis was founded in 1904.

Jessica Wolfe, Berson-Wolfe Realty Trust, 65 Central Street

- Larger stores are becoming increasingly difficult to rent, as a result of competition with malls and big box retailers

- Her Trust has resisted leasing to banks, brokerage firms and realtors, as she does not believe they are conducive to the long-term vitality of Central Street.
- Restaurants have called to inquire about space, but aren't interested due to inability to get alcohol.

Kimberly (no last name given), owner of Isabelle Harvey (moving from Linden Street to 41 Central Street for walking around traffic)

- Downtown Wellesley needs some freshness
- Like new Spring boutique and J.P. Licks
- Need more collaboration between tenants and property owners

Maura O'Brien, Executive Director of Chamber of Commerce

- Single tax rate has been an enormous help in preserving downtown and commercial property
- Dual tax rate would be a death knell.
- Town should not increase parking meter rates.
- A study is well worth the Board's time and the Chamber is willing to partner in any manner

Ms. Babson thanked the business community representatives for attending tonight's meeting and their input, and noted the Board will continue to engage with their representatives.

4. Potential Modification of Comprehensive Permit – 65 Washington Street

Mr. Larsen described Michael Connolly's request that the ZBA modify the comprehensive permit for his project at 65 Washington Street to allow the separation of two single family units from this five unit development. The Board expressed unanimous support for objecting to this request and asked Mr. Larsen to draft a letter to the ZBA to this effect.

5. Town of Needham – 300th Anniversary Proclamation

Ms. Babson noted Beth Hinchcliffe, the Town's Historian, has drafted a proclamation to be given to the Town of Needham in connection with that Town's 300th anniversary. Mr. Larsen briefly noted the plans made for a Wellesley float to participate in the Needham parade planned for the July 4th weekend.

6. Executive Director's Update

The Board voted (5-0) to approve the minutes for the following meetings of the Board of Selectmen:

- April 25, 2011
- May 2, 2011

The Board voted (5-0) to approve the request of the Wellesley Kiwanis Club permitting the Club to use a portion of the Tailby Lot on Saturday, May 21, 2011 from 8:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. for their annual Bicycle Safety Family Rodeo Day and on Sunday, June 5, 2011 from 10:30 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. for the Jack Preston Memorial Road Rally.

The Board voted (5-0) to approve the request of the Rotary Club of Wellesley permitting the use a portion of the Tailby lot for satellite parking on May 21, 2011 from 7:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. during the annual Pancake Festival.

Mr. Larsen reviewed the status of the new landscaped medians on Linden Street. Following a meeting with Federal Realty representatives late last week, the medians will be revised to bring them into compliance with the authorization previously granted by the Selectmen.

Project and Other Updates

High School – The presentation on Turn On/Off the Lights shown to the Selectmen last week will be shown to the School Committee this week.

Senior Center – Ms. Tsagaris reported on a meeting with COA representatives to discuss next steps on this project.

Advisory Committee – Ms. Babson noted that Jack Haley, Advisory Committee Chair, will present an outline of potential suggestions to the Selectmen at an upcoming meeting.

Public Transportation – Ms. Gibbs noted Maura Murphy has agreed to serve as the Advisory Committee liaison to the Study Group.

Sustainability – Mr. Ketchen noted the Committee is developing recommendations for residents to reduce their energy costs related to summer cooling.

Old Business/New Business

Mr. Dugan noted the Town has tentatively accepted the proposed redistricting map submitted by the Town.

Ms. Babson noted she submitted a letter in support of the DPW office building project to the Townsman.

At 8:48 the meeting was adjourned.