

TOWN OF WESTFORD
PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES
Minutes for April 23, 2018 Meeting
Approved on June 18, 2018

Commission/Board Members Present: Wendy Doane, Gordon Gebauer, Seth Jensen and Mark Letorney.

Commission/Board Members Absent: Koi Boynton.

Also present: Melissa Manka (Planning Coordinator), Marjorie Hamrell, Anne Maloney, Lynn Bursell, Carol Winfield, Lori Johnson, Ray Geddens and John Doane.

The meeting began at: 6:36 p.m.

Amendments to Agenda

No amendments were proposed.

Planning Commission & United Church of Westford (UCW) Joint Meeting

The UCW began by saying they envision the Brick Meeting House remaining a community center and the White Church becoming a spiritual and performance space.

Mark said there's a broad spectrum of potential community uses at both sites, but he stressed the need for the buildings to be vibrant, inviting and well used. He said property management arrangements can be made if local individuals are unable to manage and/or market the sites. He noted that the buildings would be more versatile, and potentially viable, if non-religious. Mark also said it is important that both sites generate revenue not just to run the buildings on a day to day basis but to maintain, restore and evolve them over time.

John explained that the Brick Meeting House is leased and governed by a non-profit called The Brick Meeting House Society.

Mark asked if there were performance standards in place concerning participation, capital investment, revenue, use and structure.

John said the terms are spelled out in the bylaws, incorporation documents, and lease agreement. John added that the annual Brick Meeting House expenses total approximately \$8,000 with \$4,000 of that coming from taxes, \$300 from each organization that uses the building and the rest from user fees and fundraisers.

Gordon said physical improvements are important but the most vital aspect is use.

Mark said the Town and Society should work together to ensure the Meeting House is fulfilling current community needs and desires. Mark added that the buildings could further fulfill the Town's need for social gathering places and commercial spaces with versatile design, which would be advantageous to the community on a social, cultural and economic level. He further explained that opening the buildings to the community in a more dynamic way and designing more interactive spaces could be the seed the Town Center needs at this time. Mark stated the Meeting House has the most potential to generate revenue in the short-term and long-term, if the UCW wishes to maintain the White Church as a religious center.

Wendy suggested now would be an ideal time to develop a structure that ensures the long-term success of each property.

Mark noted that unless the mission statement for each building is well-defined and unique it will be challenging to run and sustain the buildings separately.

John noted he would like to have a public kitchen versus a commercial kitchen installed at the Meeting House.

Marge said with the lease up for renewal this may be an opportunity for the UCW and Society to work together on bylaws, procedures and organizational structure.

Carol said it would be good if the properties were managed in tandem.

Wendy agreed that reconstruction would be beneficial.

John said the Society should work from its strengths and operate in stricter conformance with the original bylaws.

Seth said the key to success will be keeping and respecting the current energy as well as bringing in new energy and ideas. He added there are challenges to operating two non-profits such as increased overhead costs, additional meetings, need for more volunteers, etc., which is an issue when looking at the small pool of resources, money and people in town. He said the historic context of the properties is of utmost importance as these buildings are the bookends of the Common. He suggested that long-term grant management, budgeting and restoration efforts would be best tackled as a united front due to economies of scale. He suggested unifying the groups in planning and management as much as possible. He suggested development of a White Church Operational Board, Brick Meeting House Operational Board and Unified Governing Board, which tackles finances, legal matters and marketing. It was noted that operational boards would be ideal since each property has a unique character and use.

Gordon said in his review of the bylaws the Society is supposed to have 13 members elected by a board of directors, but this is not the case currently.

The group discussed applying for an MPG to research 1) town and community assets 2) the town and community's long-term needs 3) how to maximize existing spaces to serve those purposes and 4) develop a structure for revenue, expenses and management.

Reorganization & Rules of Procedure

The Planning Commission decided to reorganize at their next meeting. The Commission reviewed the draft Rules of Procedure.

Wendy MOVED to approve the Rules of Procedure as written.

Mark SECONDED the motion.

The motion PASSED: 4 – 0.

Citizens to be Heard, Announcements & Other Business

None.

2018 Planning Commission Work Plan

The Planning Commission reviewed and revised their work plan. (See 2018 Planning Commission Work Plan for specifics).

Minutes of the April 2, 2018 & April 16, 2018 Meetings.

The Planning Commission will review minutes at their next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:55p.m.

Submitted by,

Melissa Manka, Westford Planning Coordinator